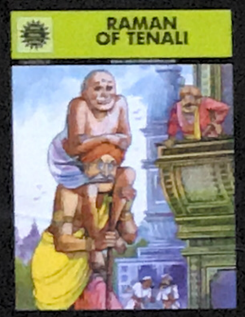
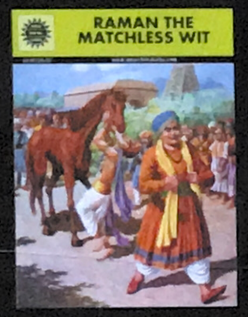
FABLES & HUMOUR

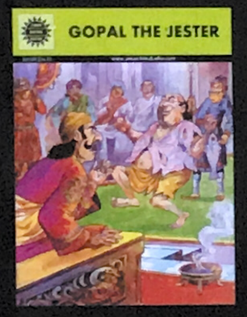
THE PRICELESS GEM

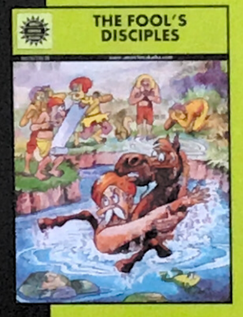
Is a glowing stone more valuable than wisdom? Is truth more precious than wealth? Answers to such questions came easily to Aushadha Kumar, a Bodhisattva at the court of King Vaideha. A previous incarnation of the wise and compassionate Gautama Buddha, the tale of his life amidst adversity and courtly rivalry defines the Buddhist ideal of right thinking and right living. This priceless gem from the Jataka fables teaches even as it entertains.

OTHER ACK FABLES & HUMOUR:









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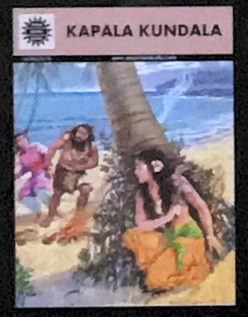

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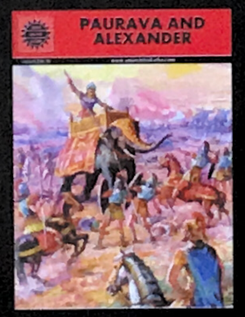

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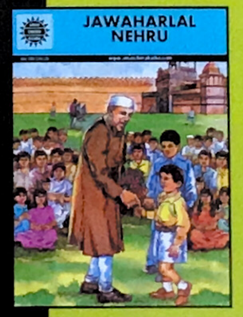

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THE PRICELESS GEM

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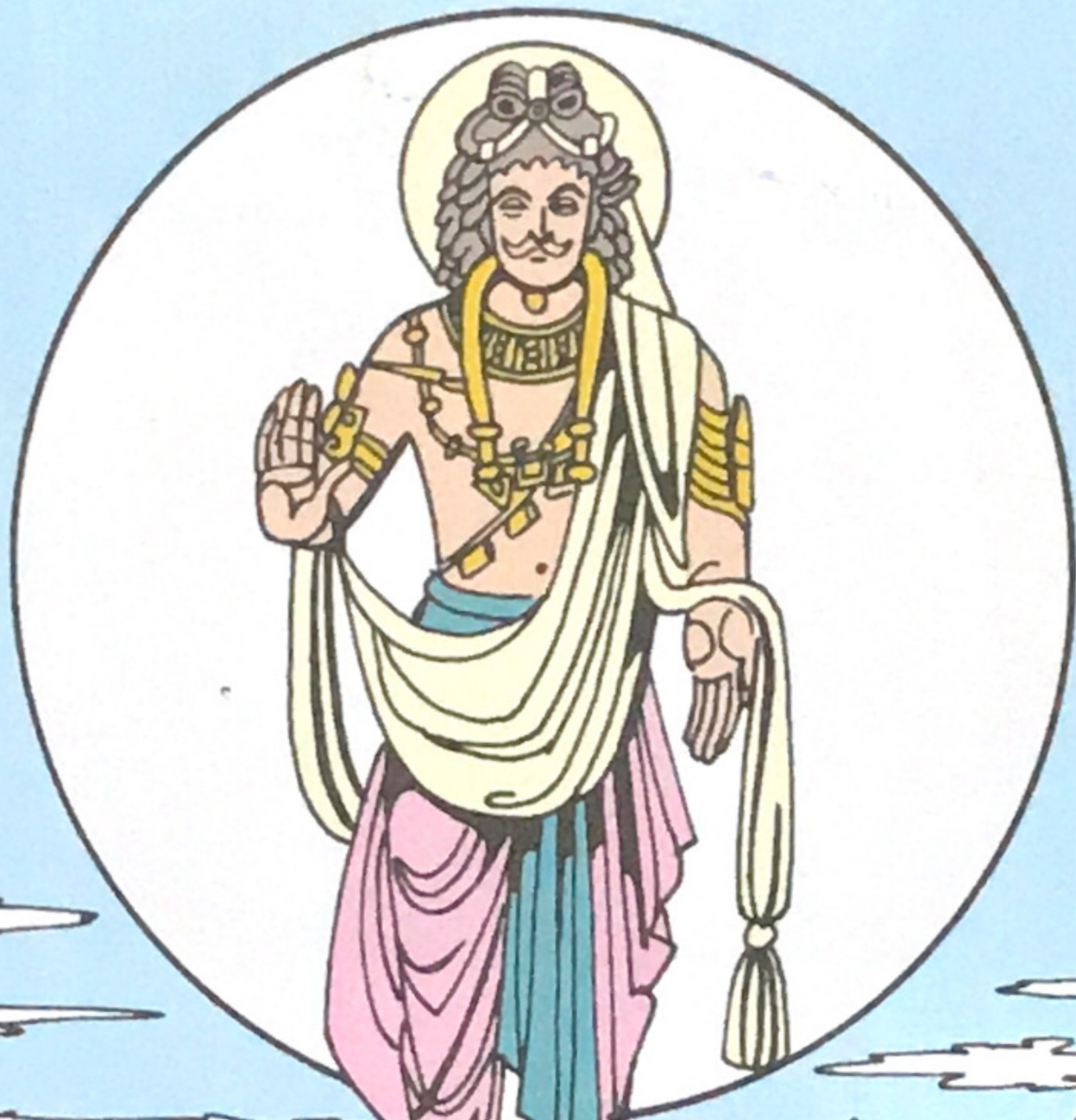
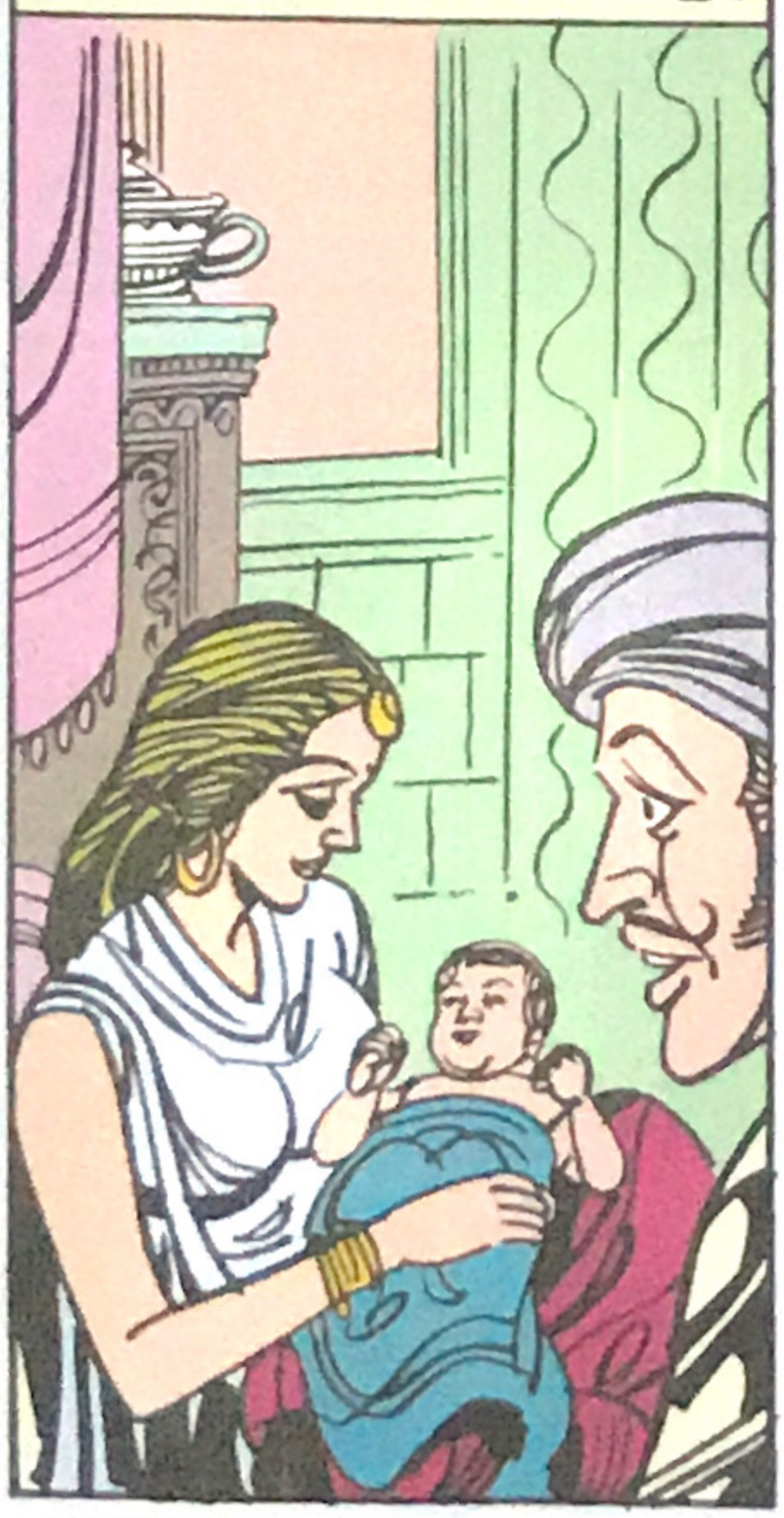
The Priceless Gem

AUSHADHA KUMAR WAS A REINCARNATION OF THE BODHISATTVA.

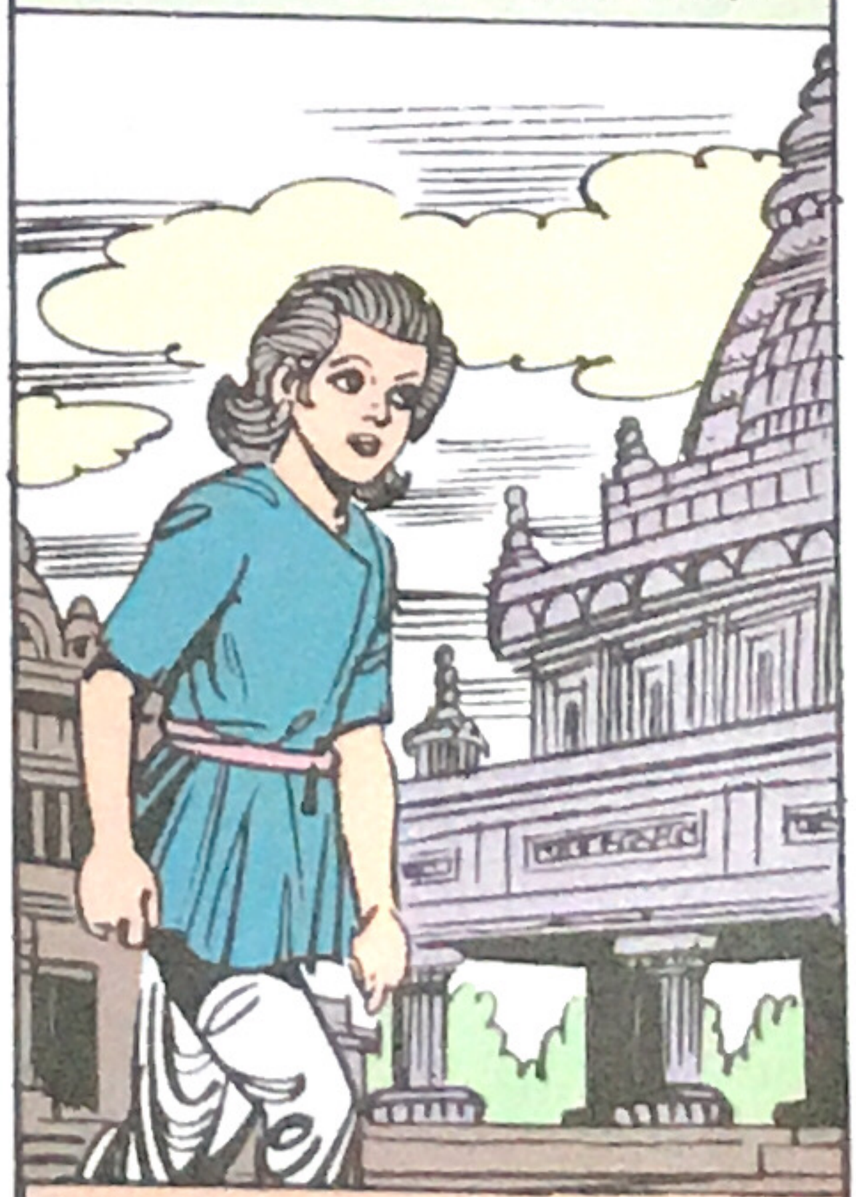


HE WAS NAMED AUSHADHA* KUMAR, BECAUSE HE WAS BORN HOLDING A DIVINE HERB WHICH HAD SUPER-NATURAL HEALING POWERS.



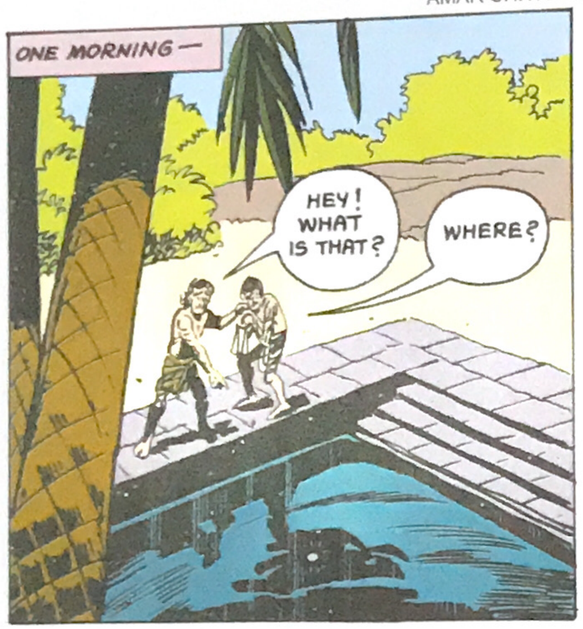
A YEAR BEFORE AUSHADHA KUMAR'S BIRTH, KING VAIDEHA OF MITHILA HAD A DREAM SIGNIFYING THE ADVENT OF A GREAT SOUL WHOSE WISDOM WOULD BE UNSURPASSED.

EIGHT YEARS LATER, CONVINCED THAT AUSHADHA WAS THAT GREAT SOUL, KING VAIDEHA ADOPTED HIM AND BROUGHT HIM TO MITHILA.

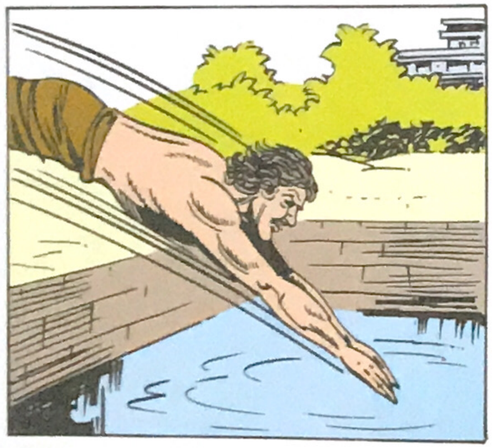


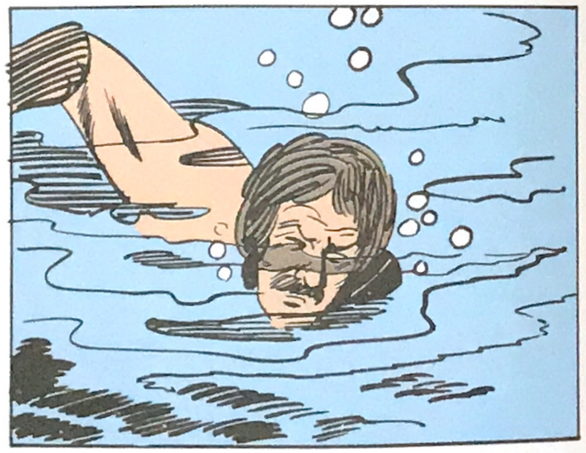
AT MITHILA, WHILE AUSHADHA GREW UP INTO A HANDSOME YOUNGSTER, THE PANDITS OF THE COURT, WHO NEVER WANTED HIM THERE IN THE FIRST PLACE BECAME ENVIOUS OF HIM.

* MEDICINE

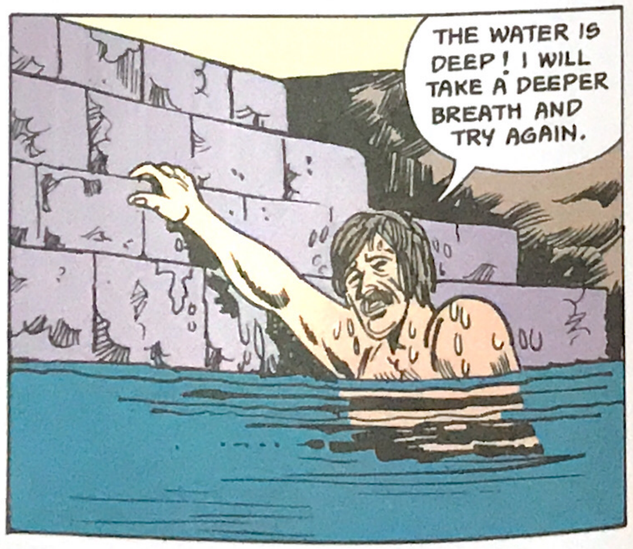

ONE MORNING —
HEY! WHAT IS THAT?
WHERE?

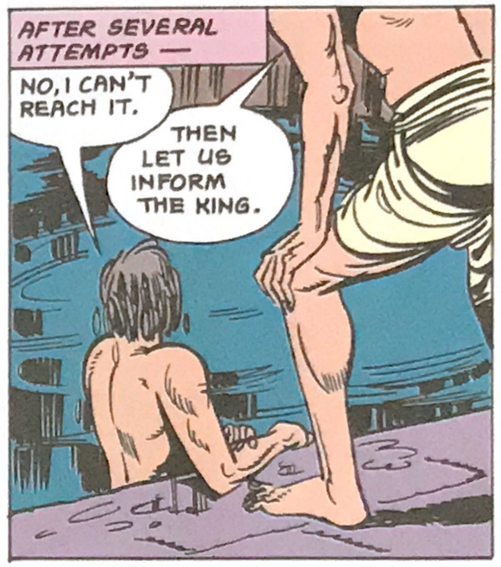
THERE. IT LOOKS LIKE A PRICELESS GEM.
WHY DON'T YOU FETCH IT?

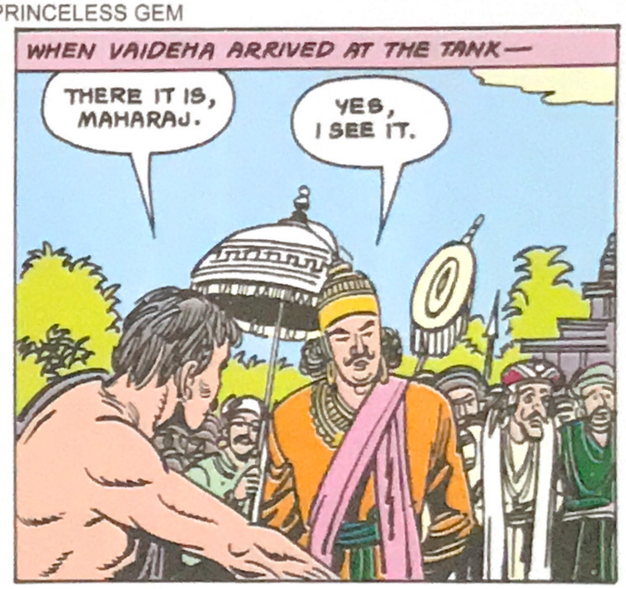


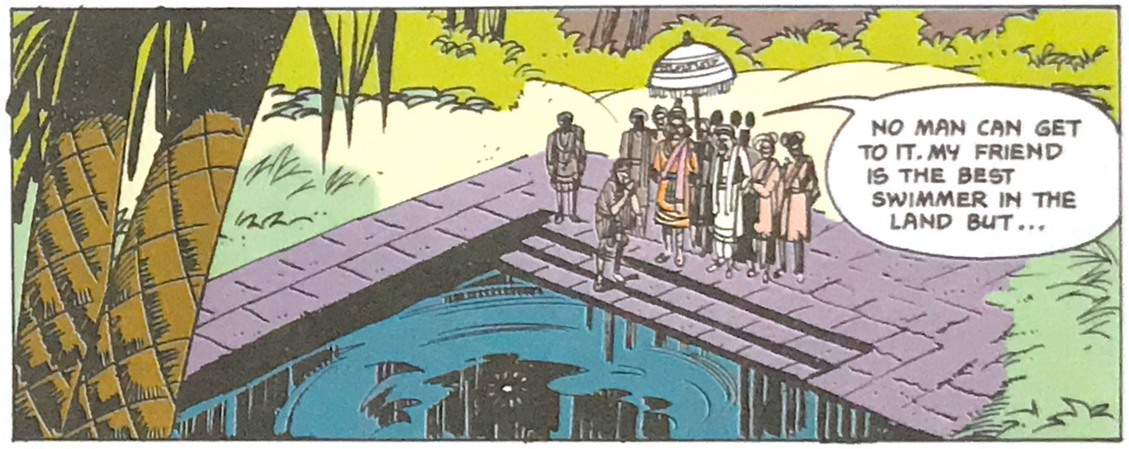


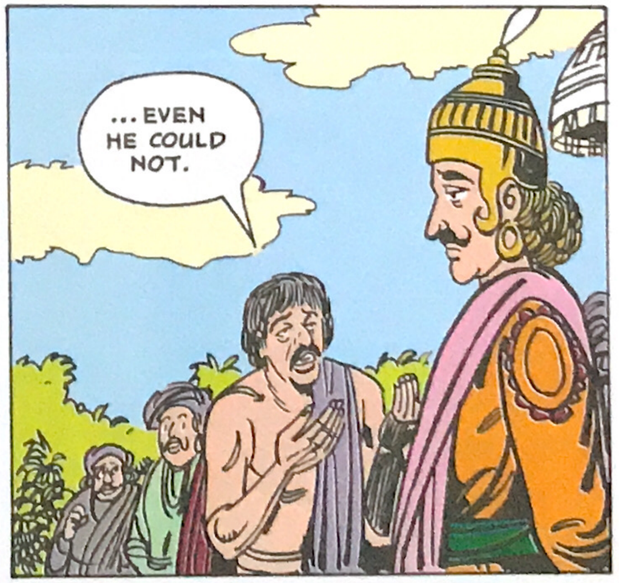
I CAN'T HOLD MY BREATH ANY LONGER.

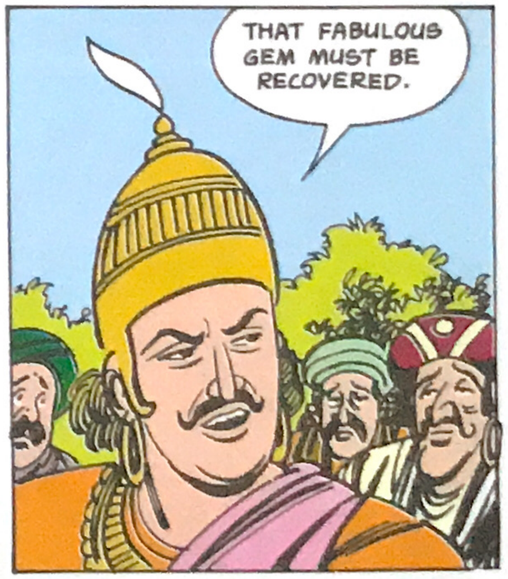

THE WATER IS DEEP! I WILL TAKE A DEEPER BREATH AND TRY AGAIN.

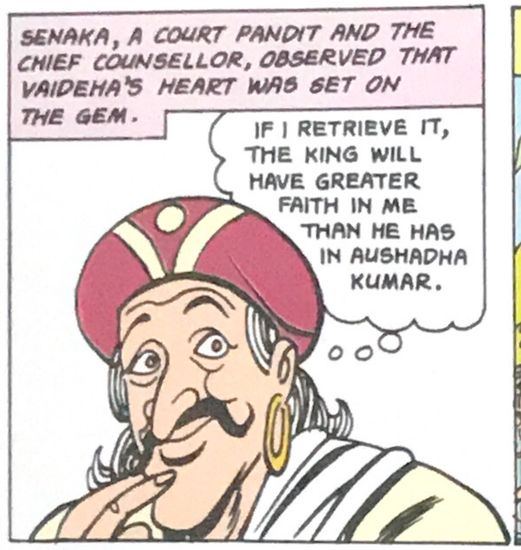

AFTER SEVERAL ATTEMPTS —
NO, I CAN'T REACH IT.
THEN LET US INFORM THE KING.

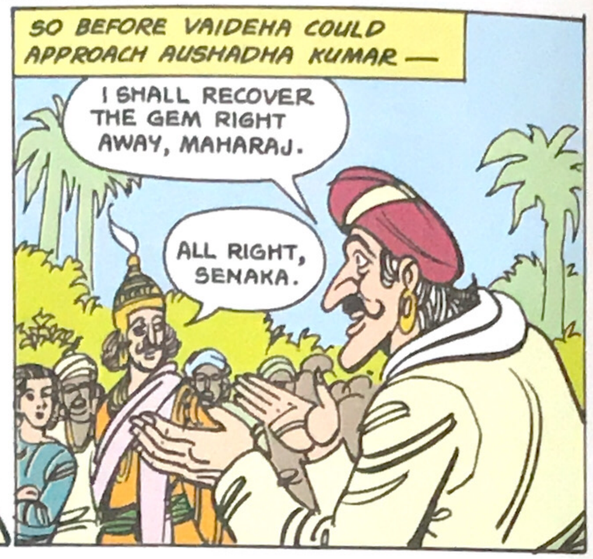

WHEN VAIDEHA ARRIVED AT THE TANK —
THERE IT IS, MAHARAJ.
YES, I SEE IT.

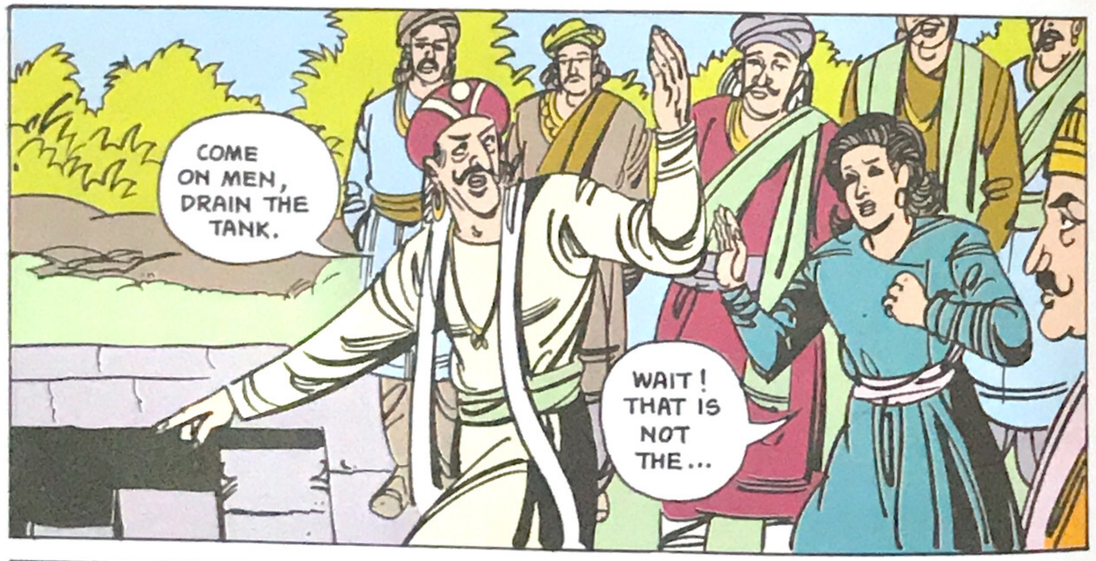

NO MAN CAN GET TO IT. MY FRIEND IS THE BEST SWIMMER IN THE LAND BUT...


...EVEN HE COULD NOT.

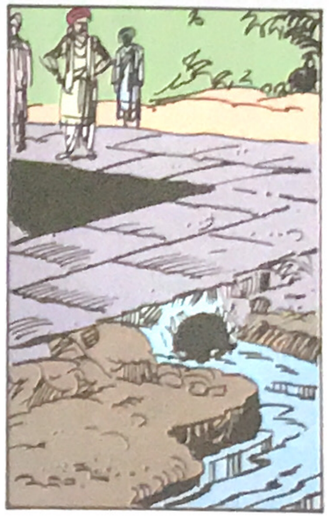

THAT FABULOUS GEM MUST BE RECOVERED.


SENAKA, A COURT PANDIT AND THE CHIEF COUNSELLOR, OBSERVED THAT VAIDEHA'S HEART WAS SET ON THE GEM.
IF I RETRIEVE IT, THE KING WILL HAVE GREATER FAITH IN ME THAN HE HAS IN AUSHADHA KUMAR.

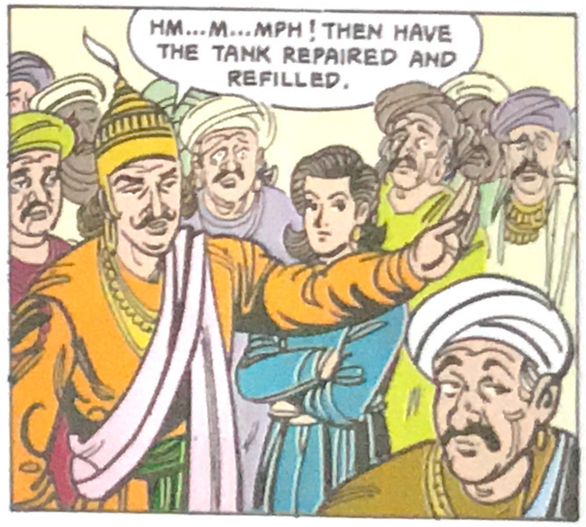

SO BEFORE VAIDEHA COULD APPROACH AUSHADHA KUMAR —
I SHALL RECOVER THE GEM RIGHT AWAY, MAHARAJ.
ALL RIGHT, SENAKA.


COME ON MEN, DRAIN THE TANK.
WAIT! THAT IS NOT THE...

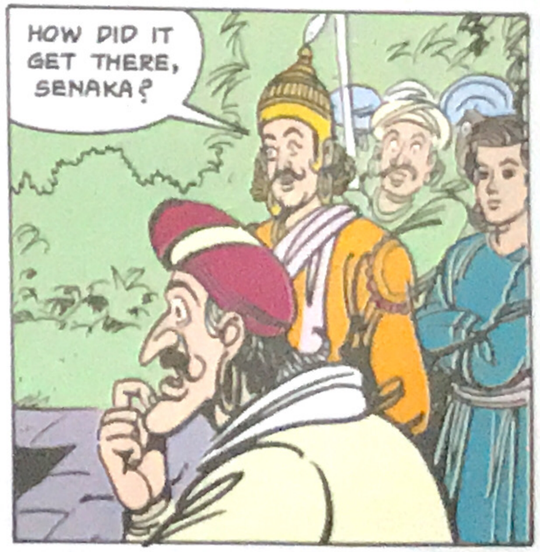
PLEASE DO NOT INTERFERE. THE TASK HAS BEEN ASSIGNED TO ME.

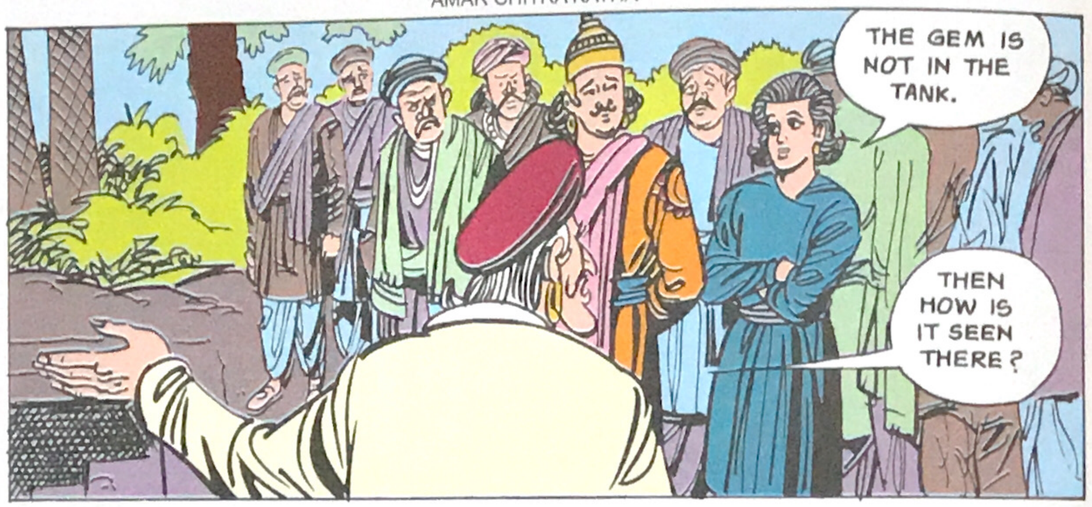


WHAT! THE GEM HAS VANISHED!

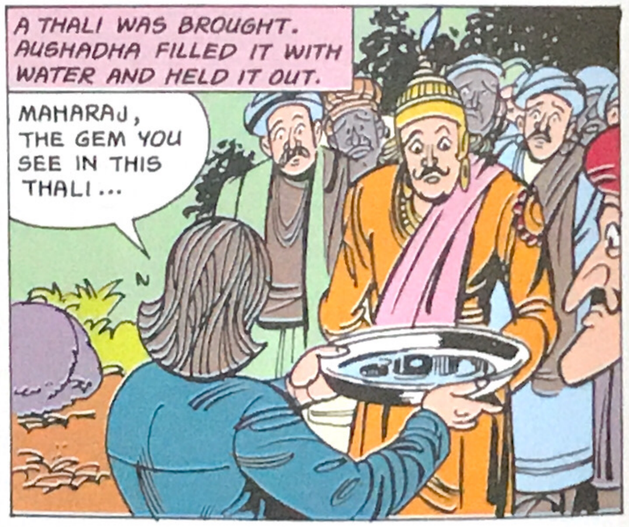

HM...M...MPH! THEN HAVE THE TANK REPAIRED AND REFILLED.

SOON THE TANK WAS FILLED AGAIN WITH WATER AND LO! THERE WAS THE GEM, GLITTERING AWAY AS BEFORE.


HOW DID IT GET THERE, SENAKA?


THE GEM IS NOT IN THE TANK.
THEN HOW IS IT SEEN THERE?

BRING ME A THALI* AND I WILL SHOW YOU HOW.

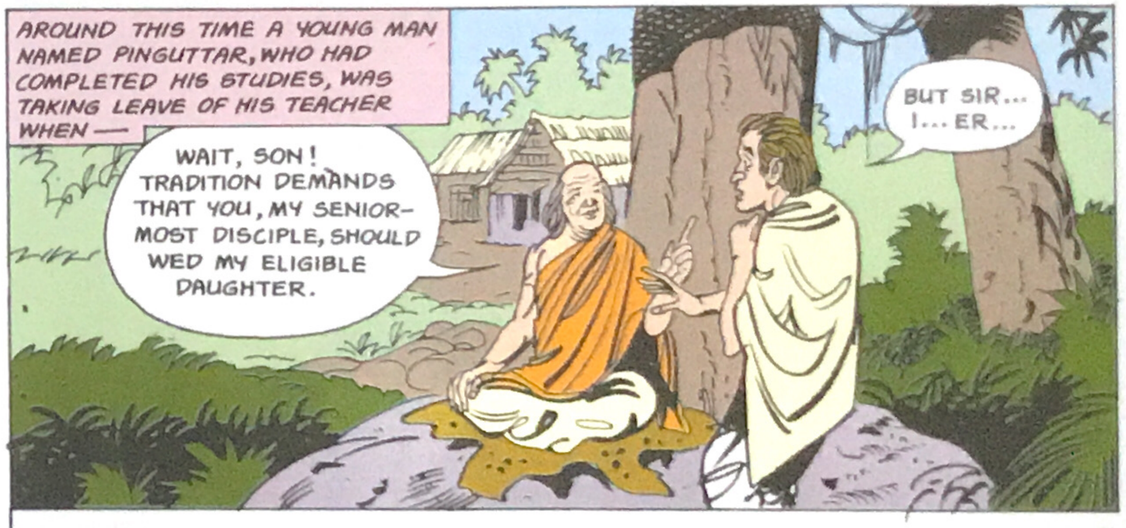

A THALI WAS BROUGHT. AUSHADHA FILLED IT WITH WATER AND HELD IT OUT.
MAHARAJ, THE GEM YOU SEE IN THIS THALI...

...IS ONLY A REFLECTION. THE REAL GEM IS IN THE CROW'S NEST IN THAT PALM TREE.

*BRASS PLATE

CAW, CAW.

AUSHADHA KUMAR PRESENTED THE PRICELESS GEM TO THE KING.
WELL DONE, AUSHADHA!

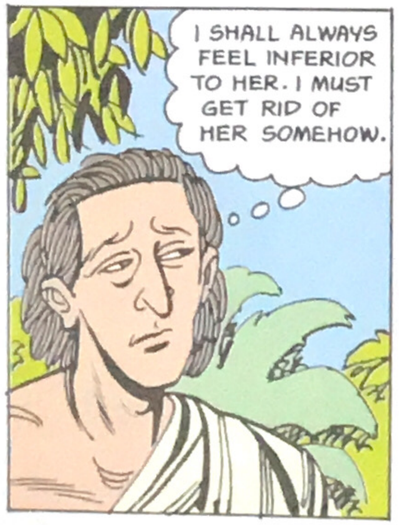

AROUND THIS TIME A YOUNG MAN NAMED PINGUTTAR, WHO HAD COMPLETED HIS STUDIES, WAS TAKING LEAVE OF HIS TEACHER WHEN —
WAIT, SON! TRADITION DEMANDS THAT YOU, MY SENIOR-MOST DISCIPLE, SHOULD WED MY ELIGIBLE DAUGHTER.
BUT SIR... I... ER...

YOUNG MAN, TRADITION MAKES US WHAT WE ARE.

WE MUST OBEY THE DICTATES OF TRADITION AT ALL COSTS.

SHE IS SO BEAUTIFUL AND I AM SO HOMELY.

AND SHE IS FAR MORE INTELLIGENT THAN I AM.


I SHALL ALWAYS FEEL INFERIOR TO HER. I MUST GET RID OF HER SOMEHOW.

SOON, THEY CAME UPON A GOOLAR* TREE IN THE JUNGLE. PINGUTTAR SUDDENLY FELT HUNGRY.

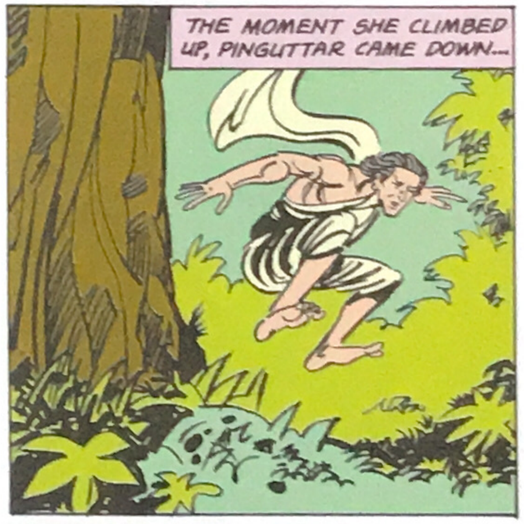
I WILL EAT SOME GOOLARS.

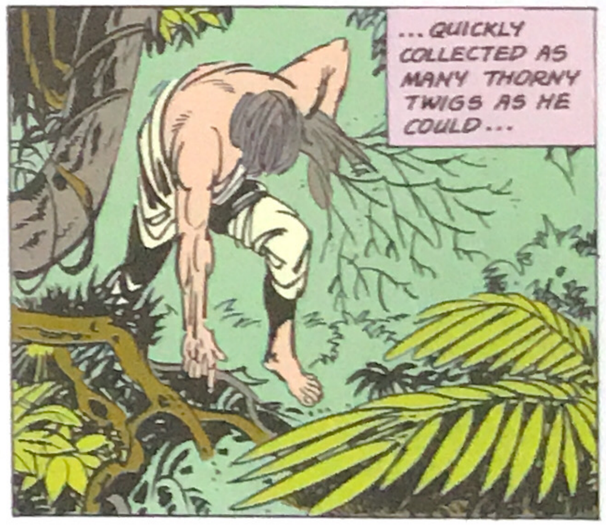
HE CLIMBED UP THE TREE AND STARTED GOBBLING THE FRUIT.

* WILD FIG.

PLEASE PLUCK SOME FOR ME TOO.
PLUCK THEM YOUR-SELF.

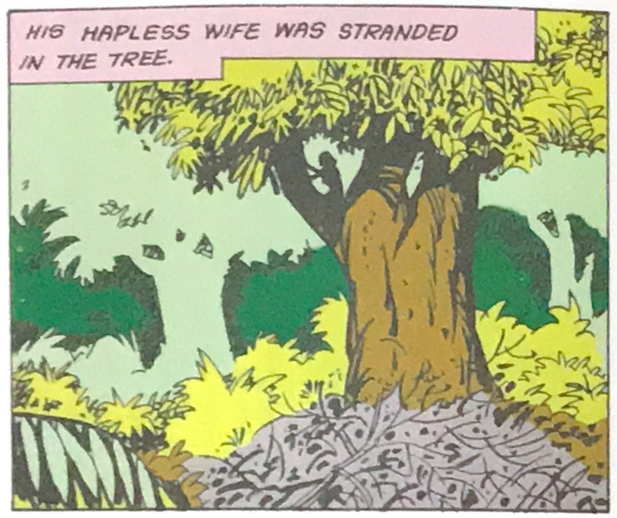
HIS POOR WIFE WAS FORCED TO CLIMB THE TREE.

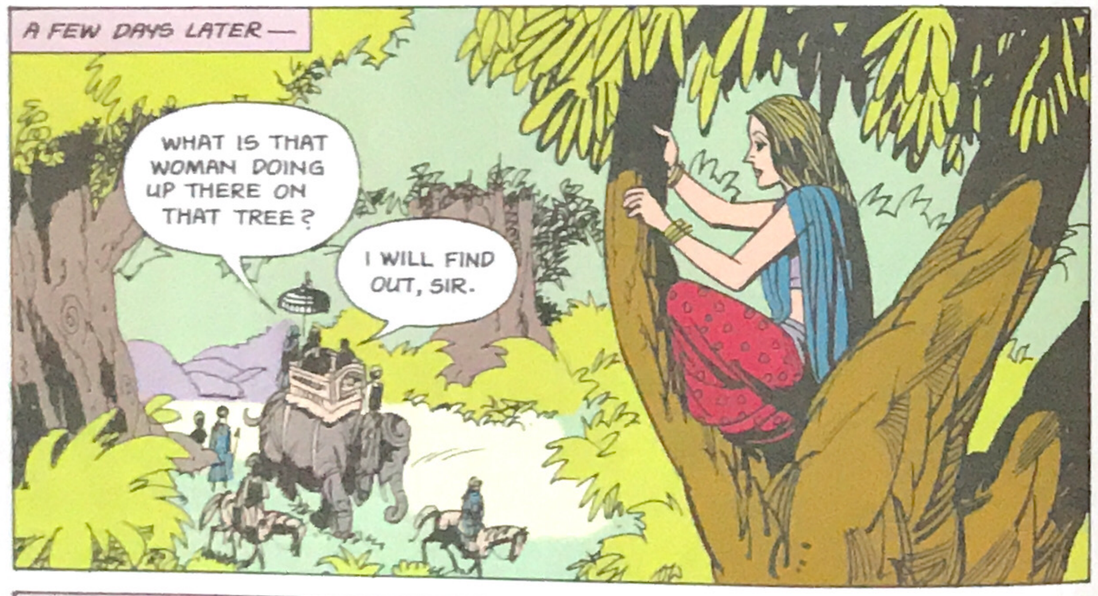

THE MOMENT SHE CLIMBED UP, PINGUTTAR CAME DOWN...

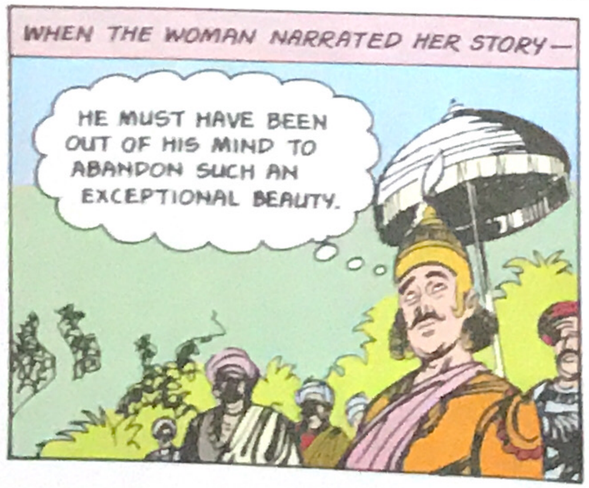

...QUICKLY COLLECTED AS MANY THORNY TWIGS AS HE COULD...

...AND PLACED THEM AROUND THE TRUNK OF THE TREE.

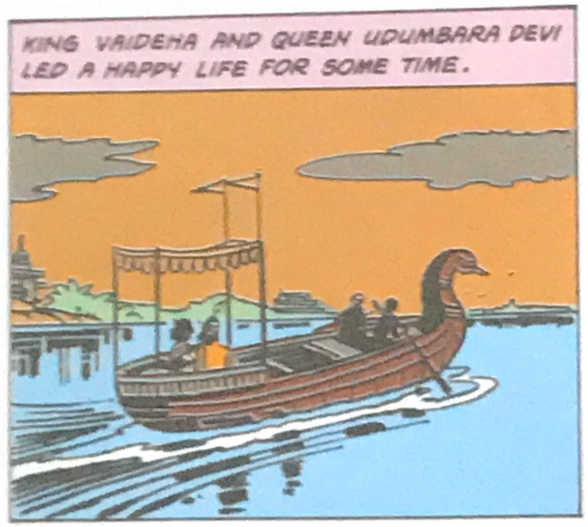
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
GETTING RID OF YOU. I DID NOT WANT TO MARRY YOU, YOUR FATHER FORCED YOU ON ME.







* WILD FIG - GOOLAR

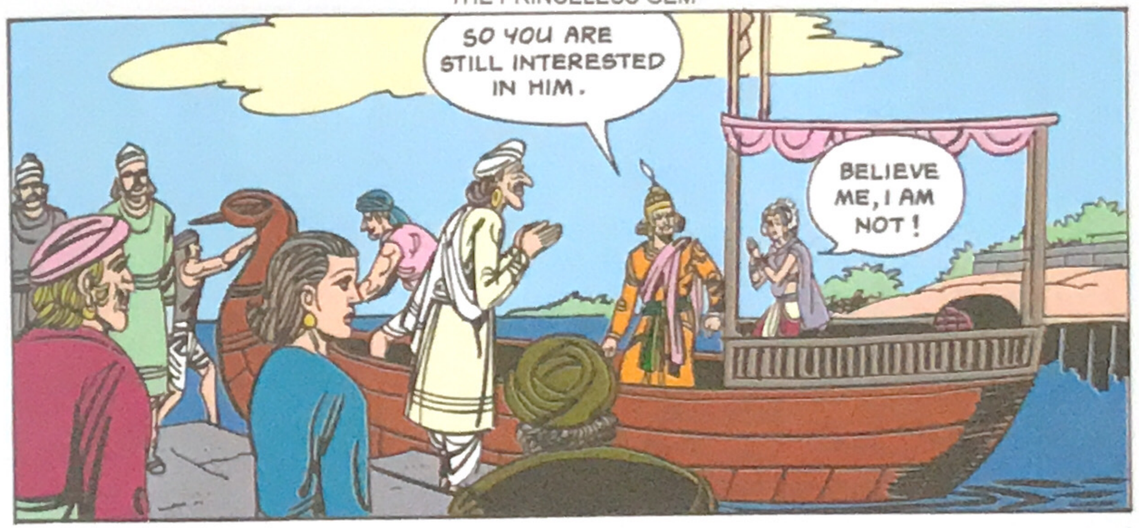

KING VAIDEHA AND QUEEN UDUMBARA DEVI LED A HAPPY LIFE FOR SOME TIME.

THEN, ONE DAY —
THAT MAN ? HE LOOKS LIKE...

YES, IT IS HIM. WHAT A FATE!

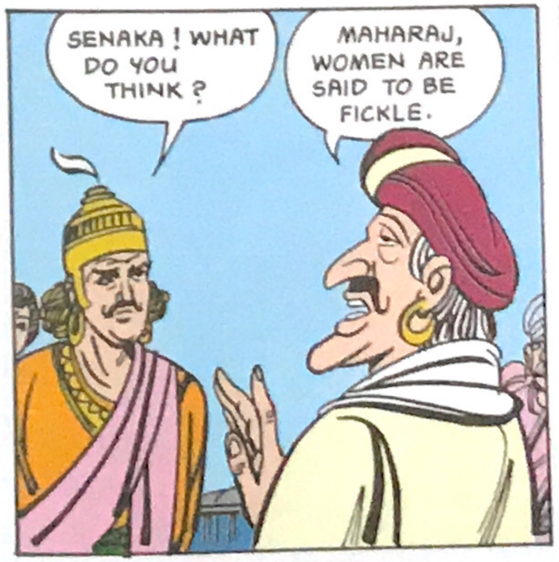
AND THE QUEEN SUDDENLY SMILED. THE KING SAW HER SMILE AND BECAME ANGRY.

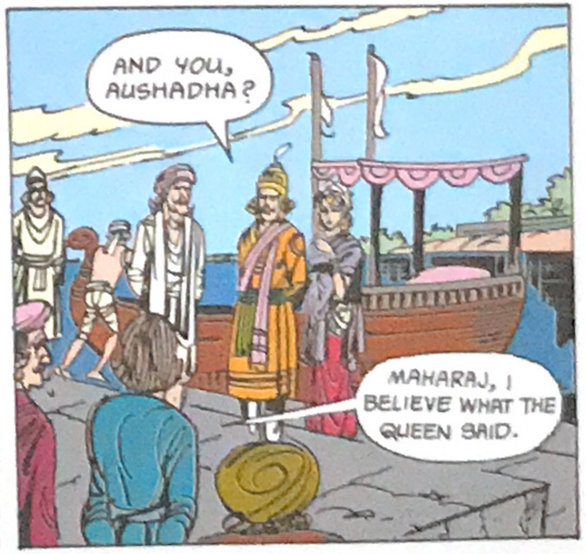
HOW DARE YOU SMILE AT A STRANGE MAN ?
HE IS THE MAN WHO ABANDONED ME.

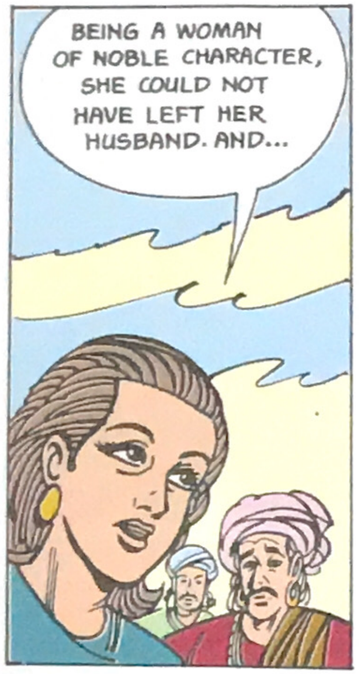

SO YOU ARE STILL INTERESTED IN HIM.
BELIEVE ME, I AM NOT !

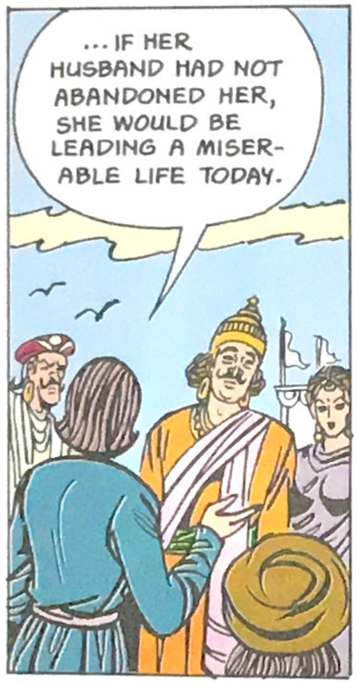
YOU LIE ! I SHALL HAVE YOU BE-HEADED!
I AM INNOCENT.

YOUR COUNSELLORS WILL VOUCH FOR THAT.
IF I CONCUR WITH THE KING HE WILL BE PLEASED.

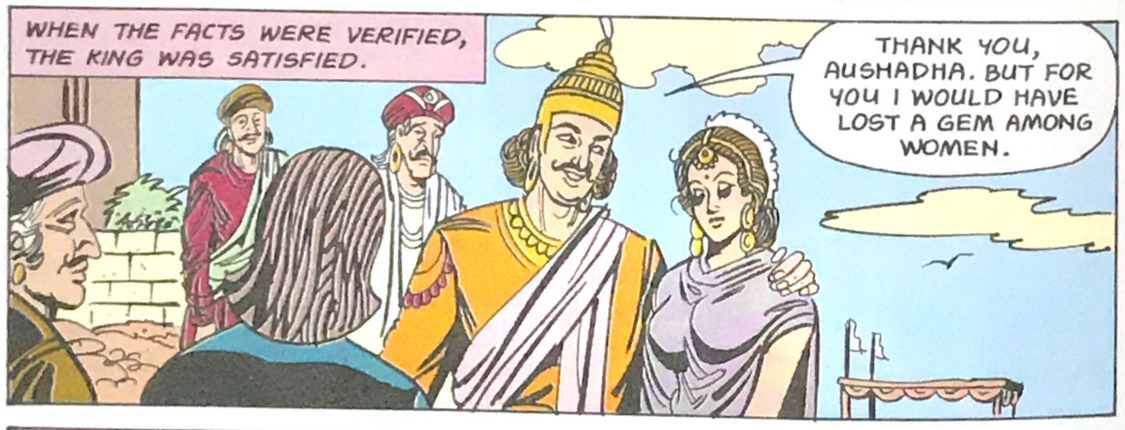

SENAKA ! WHAT DO YOU THINK ?
MAHARAJ, WOMEN ARE SAID TO BE FICKLE.

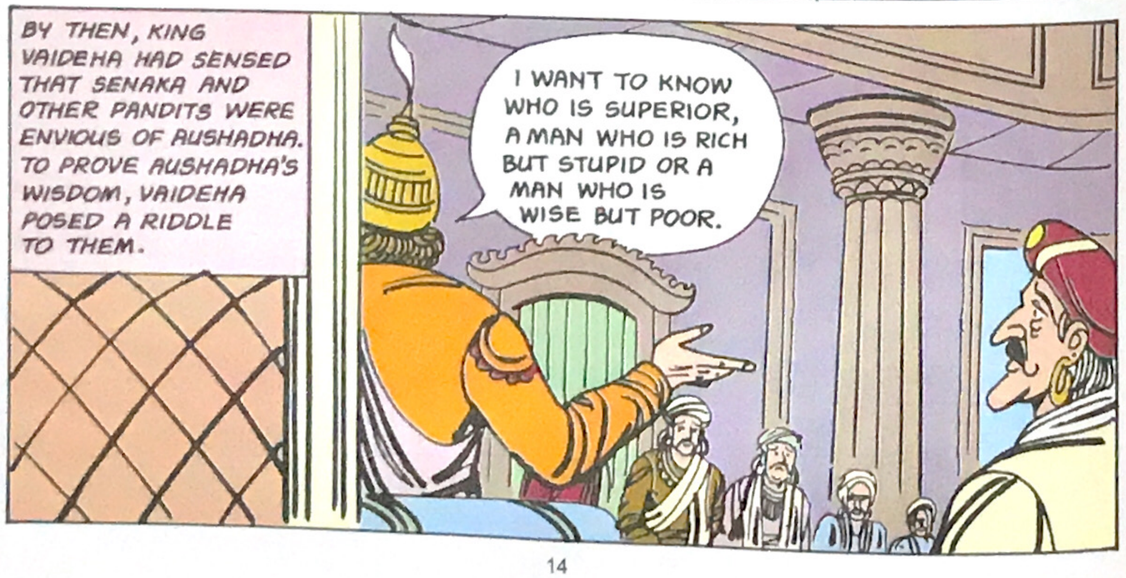

AND YOU, AUSHADHA ?
MAHARAJ, I BELIEVE WHAT THE QUEEN SAID.


BEING A WOMAN OF NOBLE CHARACTER, SHE COULD NOT HAVE LEFT HER HUSBAND. AND...

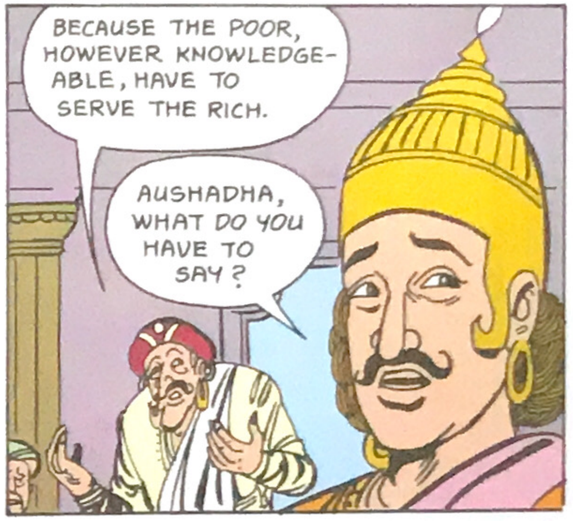

...IF HER HUSBAND HAD NOT ABANDONED HER, SHE WOULD BE LEADING A MISERABLE LIFE TODAY.

SO, WHEN I SAW THE PLIGHT OF THE MAN, I COULD NOT HELP BEING PLEASED WITH MY FATE. THAT IS WHY I SMILED.


WHEN THE FACTS WERE VERIFIED, THE KING WAS SATISFIED.
THANK YOU, AUSHADHA. BUT FOR YOU I WOULD HAVE LOST A GEM AMONG WOMEN.

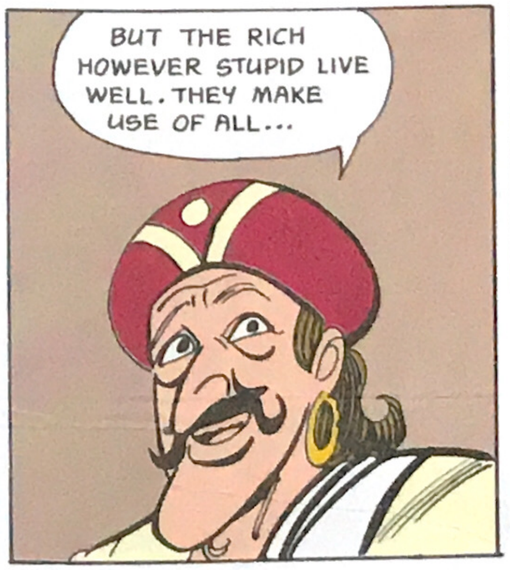

BY THEN, KING VAIDEHA HAD SENSED THAT SENAKA AND OTHER PANDITS WERE ENVIOUS OF AUSHADHA. TO PROVE AUSHADHA'S WISDOM, VAIDEHA POSED A RIDDLE TO THEM.
I WANT TO KNOW WHO IS SUPERIOR, A MAN WHO IS RICH BUT STUPID OR A MAN WHO IS WISE BUT POOR.

THE RICH ONE IS SUPERIOR WITHOUT DOUBT.
WHY?

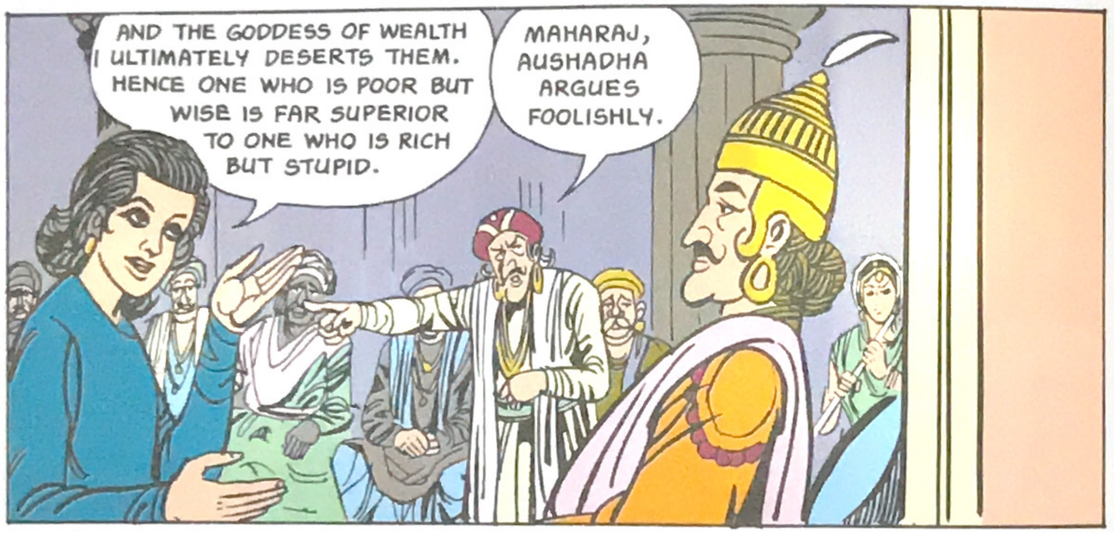

BECAUSE THE POOR, HOWEVER KNOWLEDGEABLE, HAVE TO SERVE THE RICH.
AUSHADHA, WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY?

MAHARAJ, I SAY THE WISE ONE IS FAR SUPERIOR.
WHY?

BECAUSE, THE STUPID SEE WEALTH AS AN END IN ITSELF AND HENCE COMMIT SINS, WHEREAS THE WISE DO NOT AND ARE HENCE VIRTUOUS.

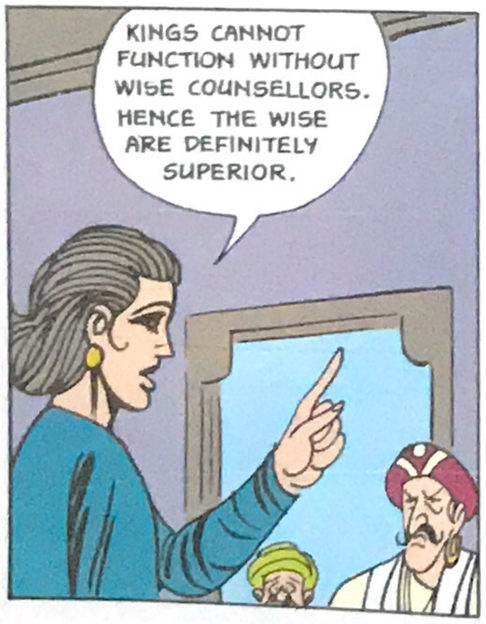

BUT THE RICH HOWEVER STUPID LIVE WELL. THEY MAKE USE OF ALL...

...INCLUDING THE WISE WHO ARE POOR!
NOT FOR LONG. FOR THE RICH WHO ARE STUPID DO NOT HAVE THE SENSE TO EMPLOY WISE ADVISERS.


AND THE GODDESS OF WEALTH ULTIMATELY DESERTS THEM. HENCE ONE WHO IS POOR BUT WISE IS FAR SUPERIOR TO ONE WHO IS RICH BUT STUPID.
MAHARAJ, AUSHADHA ARGUES FOOLISHLY.

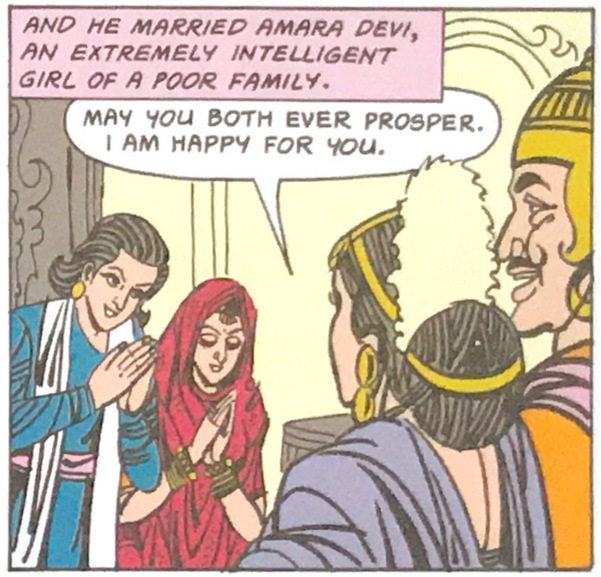
NOW LOOK AT US. DON'T WE, YOUR COUNSELLORS, THOUGH WE ARE PANDITS, BOW BEFORE YOU? DOES NOT THAT PROVE MY POINT?

ON THE CONTRARY!

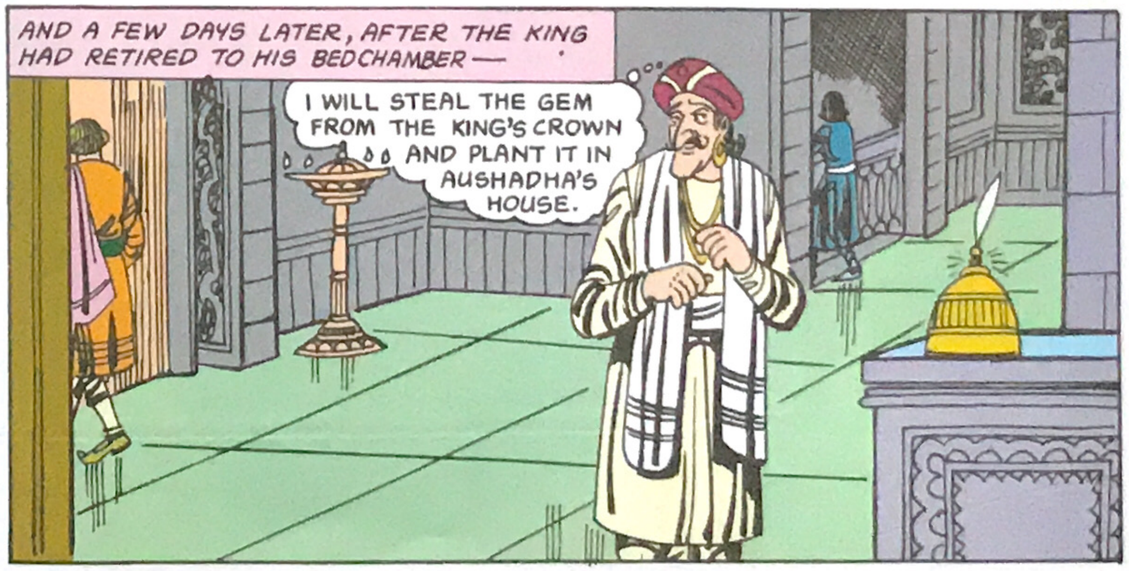

KINGS CANNOT FUNCTION WITHOUT WISE COUNSELLORS. HENCE THE WISE ARE DEFINITELY SUPERIOR.

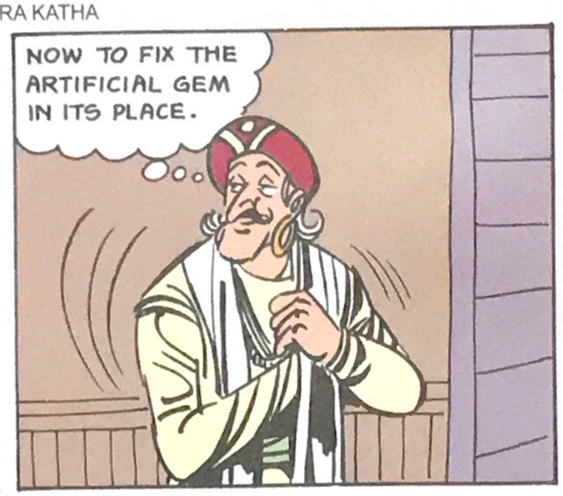
SENAKA COULD NOT REFUTE THAT.
YOUR LOGIC IS ASTOUNDING, AUSHADHA. YOU DESERVE SIXTEEN VILLAGES AS A REWARD.
I AM GRATEFUL, MAHARAJ.

QUEEN UDUMBARA DEVI WAS HAPPY WITH THE GROWING STATUS OF AUSHADHA KUMAR.
YOU SHOULD GET MARRIED NOW. SHALL I FIND A BRIDE FOR YOU?
O QUEEN, I WILL FIND ONE MYSELF.

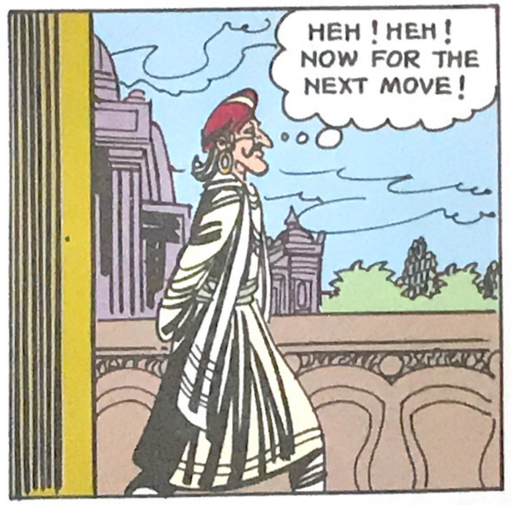

AND HE MARRIED AMARA DEVI, AN EXTREMELY INTELLIGENT GIRL OF A POOR FAMILY.
MAY YOU BOTH EVER PROSPER. I AM HAPPY FOR YOU.

THEY ARE PLEASED BY HIS CHOICE. NOW HIS STATUS WILL RISE FURTHER, WHILE OURS WILL DECLINE.
DO NOT WORRY. WE WILL HUMBLE AUSHADHA THROUGH HIS WIFE.

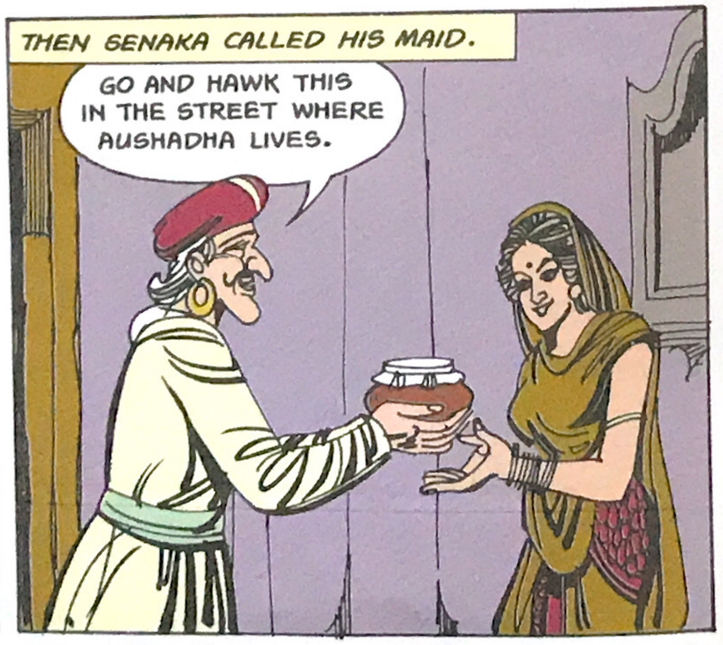

AND A FEW DAYS LATER, AFTER THE KING HAD RETIRED TO HIS BEDCHAMBER—
I WILL STEAL THE GEM FROM THE KING'S CROWN AND PLANT IT IN AUSHADHA'S HOUSE.

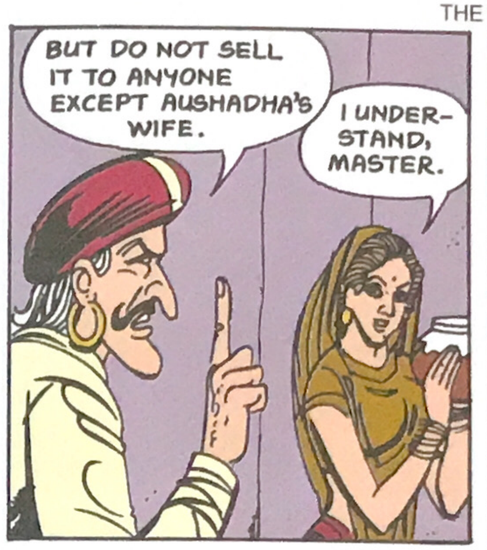

NOW TO FIX THE ARTIFICIAL GEM IN ITS PLACE.

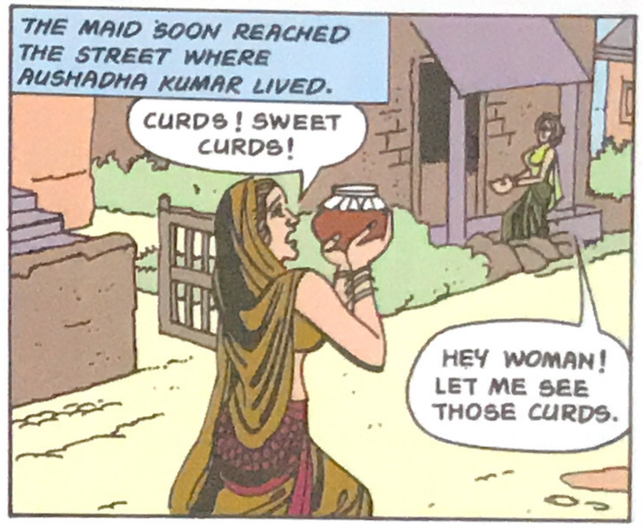
WHAT A GENIUS I AM!

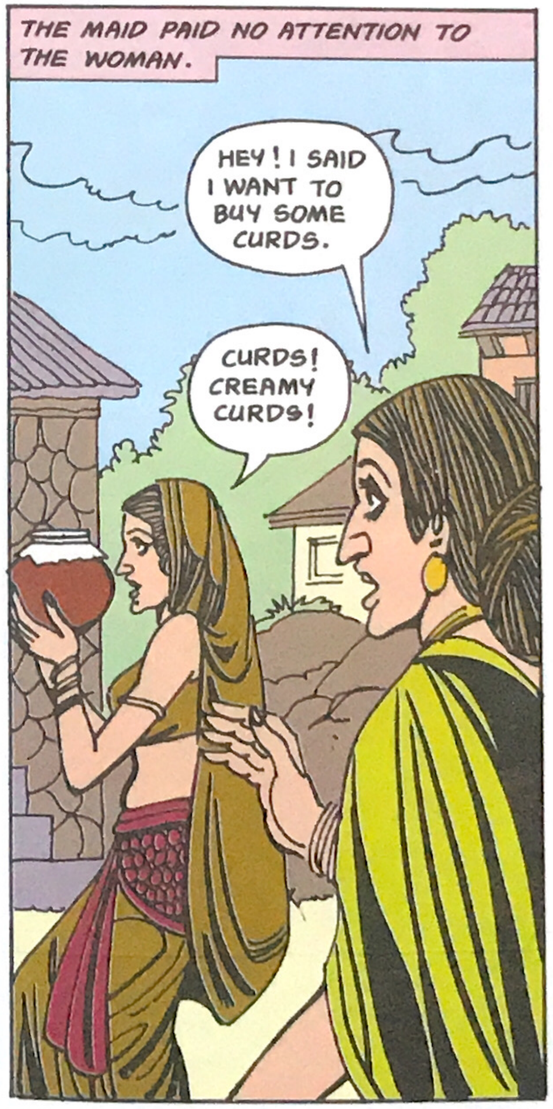

HEH! HEH! NOW FOR THE NEXT MOVE!

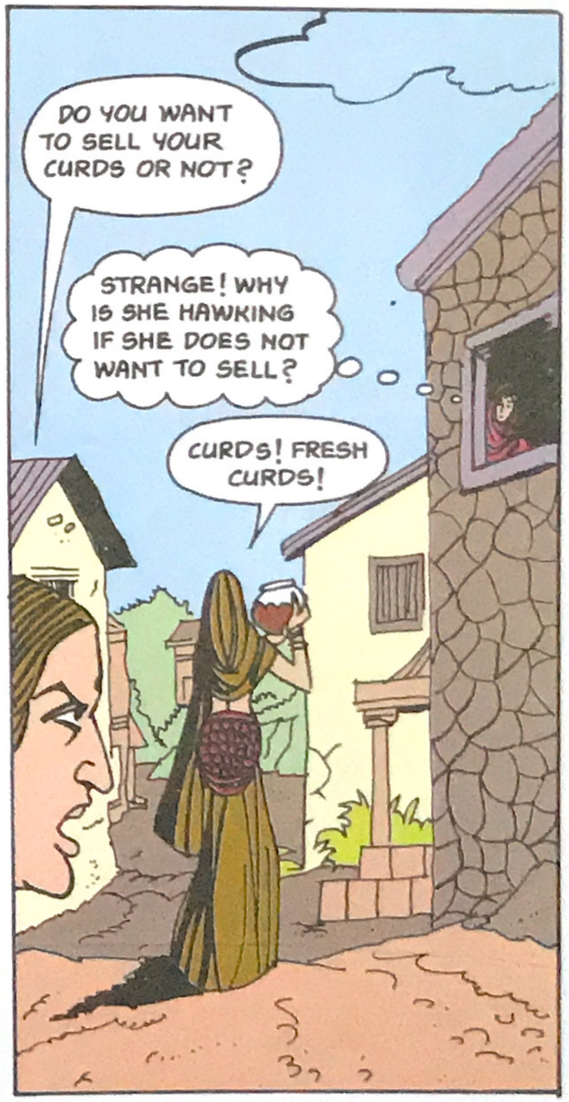
AH, MY BEAUTY! IT HURTS ME TO DROP YOU INTO THIS POT OF CURDS.

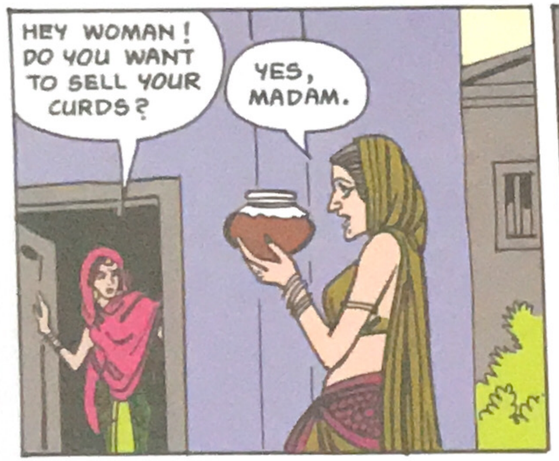

THEN SENAKA CALLED HIS MAID.
GO AND HAWK THIS IN THE STREET WHERE AUSHADHA LIVES.


BUT DO NOT SELL IT TO ANYONE EXCEPT AUSHADHA'S WIFE.
I UNDER-STAND, MASTER.


THE MAID SOON REACHED THE STREET WHERE AUSHADHA KUMAR LIVED.
CURDS! SWEET CURDS!
HEY WOMAN! LET ME SEE THOSE CURDS.

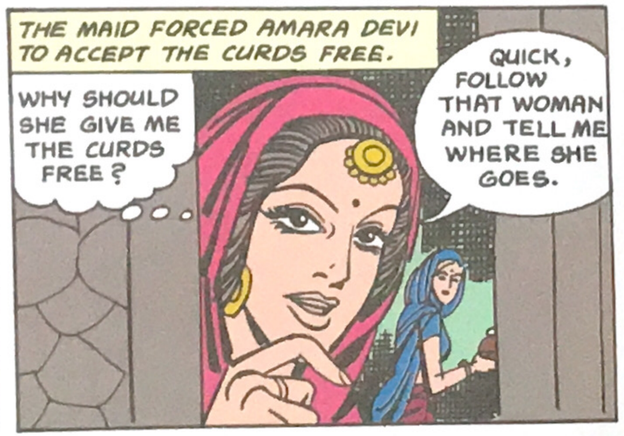

THE MAID PAID NO ATTENTION TO THE WOMAN.
HEY! I SAID I WANT TO BUY SOME CURDS.
CURDS! CREAMY CURDS!

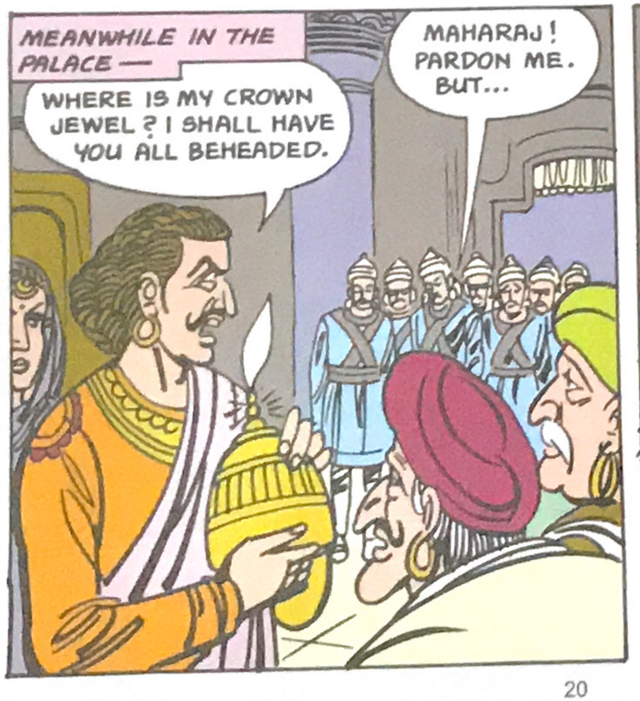

DO YOU WANT TO SELL YOUR CURDS OR NOT?
STRANGE! WHY IS SHE HAWKING IF SHE DOES NOT WANT TO SELL?
CURDS! FRESH CURDS!

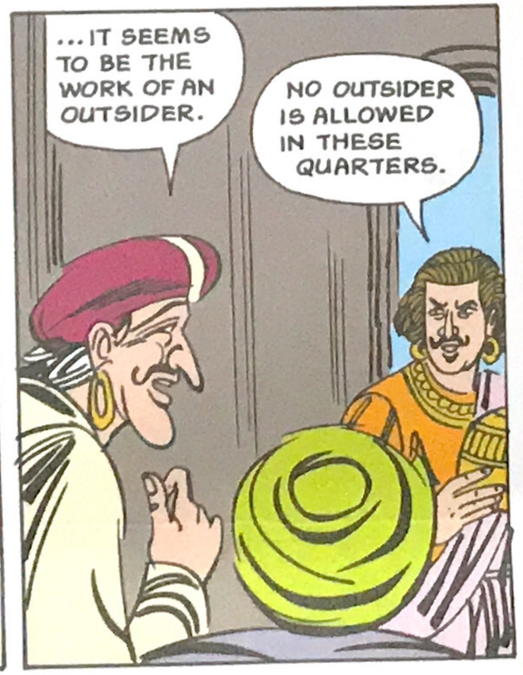

HEY WOMAN! DO YOU WANT TO SELL YOUR CURDS?
YES, MADAM.

HOW MUCH DO YOU WANT?
NOTHING.

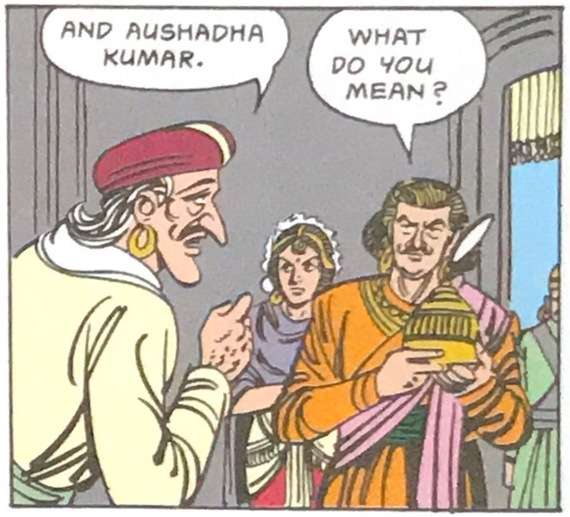
BUT YOU MUST ACCEPT SOME MONEY.
NOT FROM YOU, O WIFE OF PANDIT AUSHADHA KUMAR.

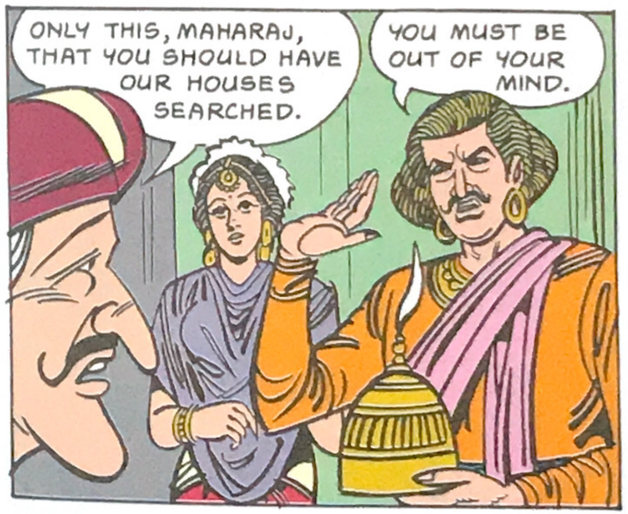

THE MAID FORCED AMARA DEVI TO ACCEPT THE CURDS FREE.
WHY SHOULD SHE GIVE ME THE CURDS FREE?
QUICK, FOLLOW THAT WOMAN AND TELL ME WHERE SHE GOES.

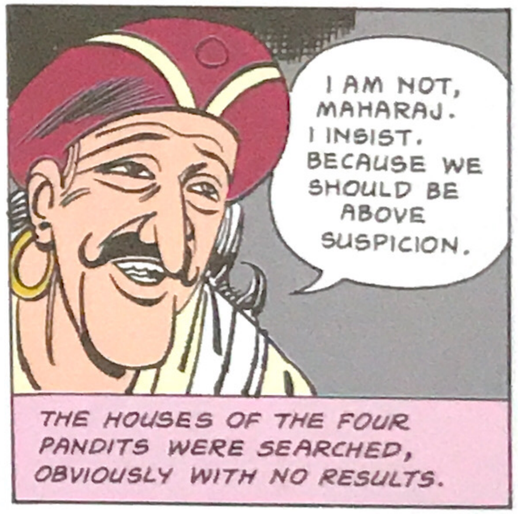

MEANWHILE IN THE PALACE —
WHERE IS MY CROWN JEWEL? I SHALL HAVE YOU ALL BEHEADED.
MAHARAJ! PARDON ME. BUT...

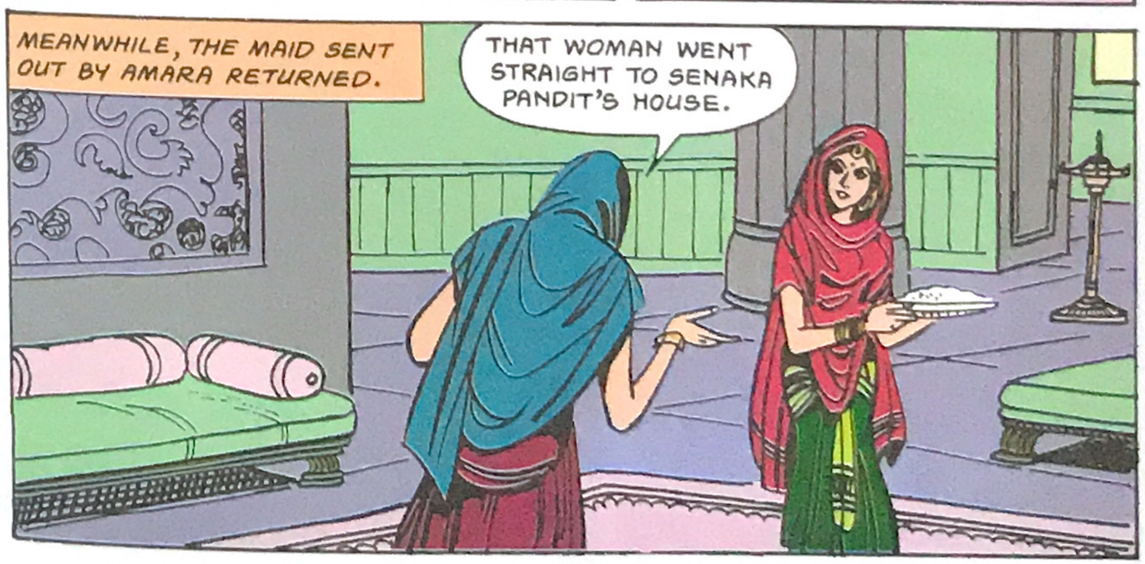

...IT SEEMS TO BE THE WORK OF AN OUTSIDER.
NO OUTSIDER IS ALLOWED IN THESE QUARTERS.

THEY ARE, MAHARAJ! WHAT ABOUT US AND...
AND!


AND AUSHADHA KUMAR.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?


ONLY THIS, MAHARAJ, THAT YOU SHOULD HAVE OUR HOUSES SEARCHED.
YOU MUST BE OUT OF YOUR MIND.

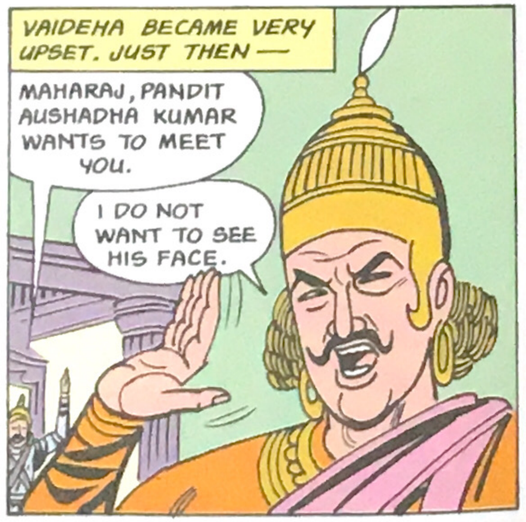

I AM NOT, MAHARAJ. I INSIST. BECAUSE WE SHOULD BE ABOVE SUSPICION.
THE HOUSES OF THE FOUR PANDITS WERE SEARCHED, OBVIOUSLY WITH NO RESULTS.

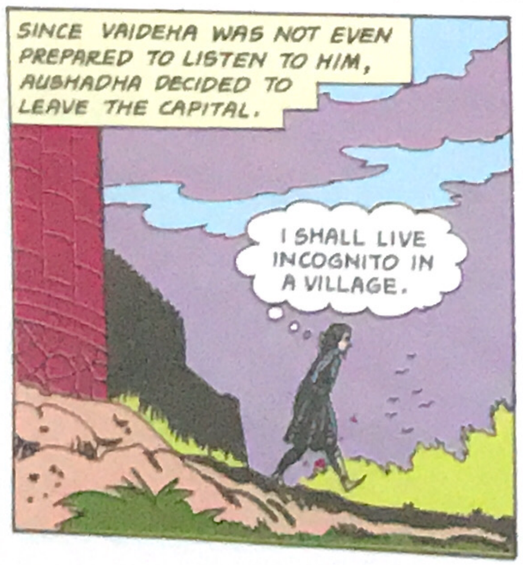

MEANWHILE, THE MAID SENT OUT BY AMARA RETURNED.
THAT WOMAN WENT STRAIGHT TO SENAKA PANDIT'S HOUSE.

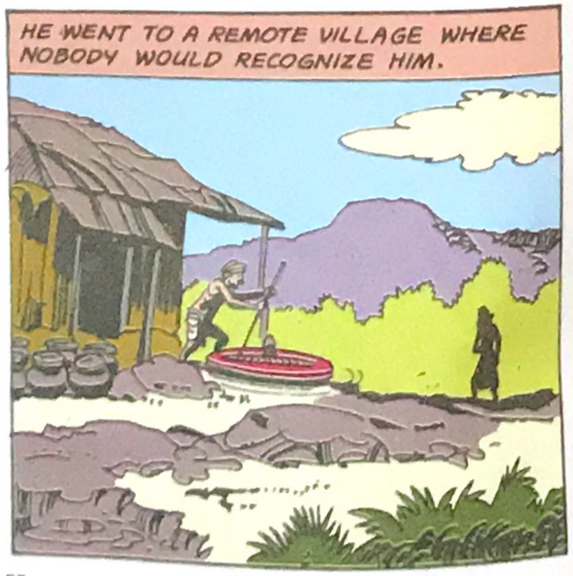
BANG!
BANG!
OBVIOUSLY SENAKA SENT THIS POT OF CURDS. BUT WHY ?

WHO IS IT ?
SOLDIERS! OPEN THE DOOR.

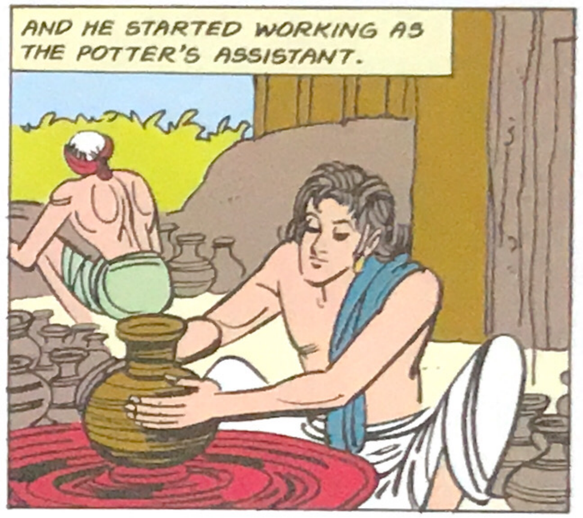
A FEW HOURS LATER —
WE FOUND THE JEWEL MAHARAJ, IN AUSHADHA KUMAR'S HOUSE. IT WAS HIDDEN IN A POT OF CURDS.
VERY CLEVER!

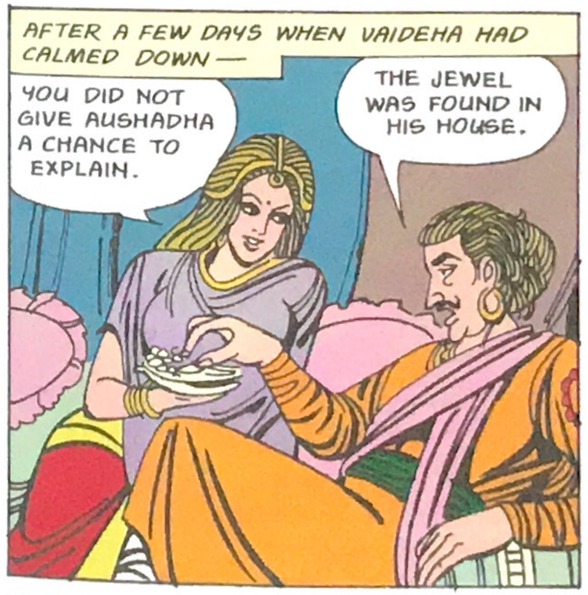

VAIDEHA BECAME VERY UPSET. JUST THEN —
MAHARAJ, PANDIT AUSHADHA KUMAR WANTS TO MEET YOU.
I DO NOT WANT TO SEE HIS FACE.


SINCE VAIDEHA WAS NOT EVEN PREPARED TO LISTEN TO HIM, AUSHADHA DECIDED TO LEAVE THE CAPITAL.
I SHALL LIVE INCOGNITO IN A VILLAGE.


HE WENT TO A REMOTE VILLAGE WHERE NOBODY WOULD RECOGNIZE HIM.

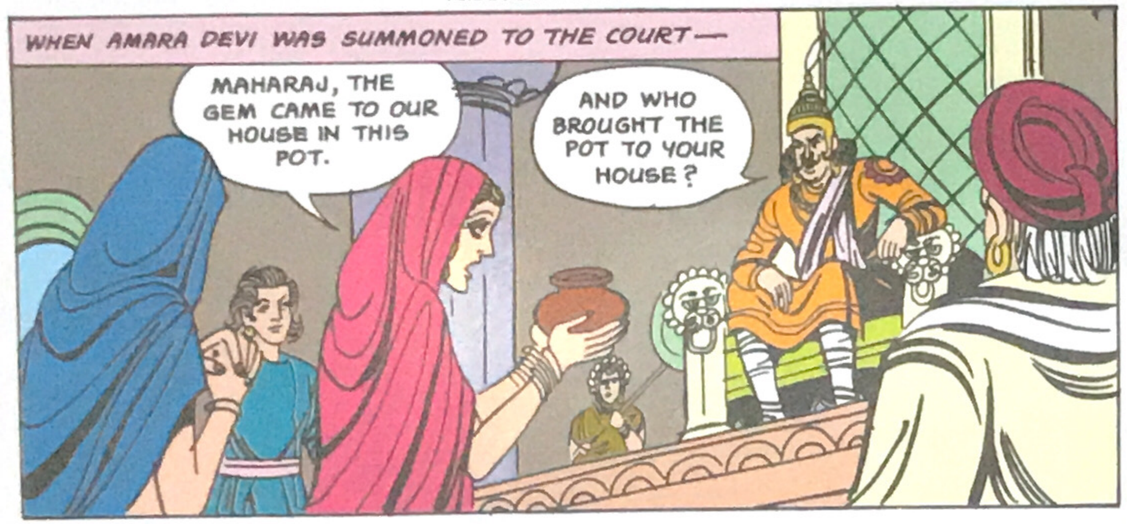
GRANDPA, DO YOU NEED AN ASSIS-TANT ?
YES, SON, I COULD DO WITH HELP.

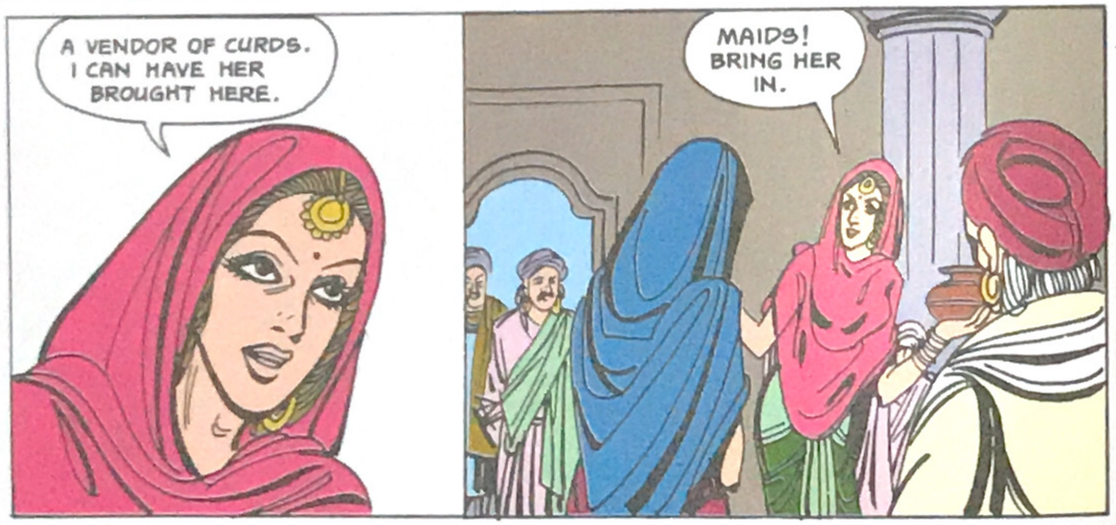

AND HE STARTED WORKING AS THE POTTER'S ASSISTANT.

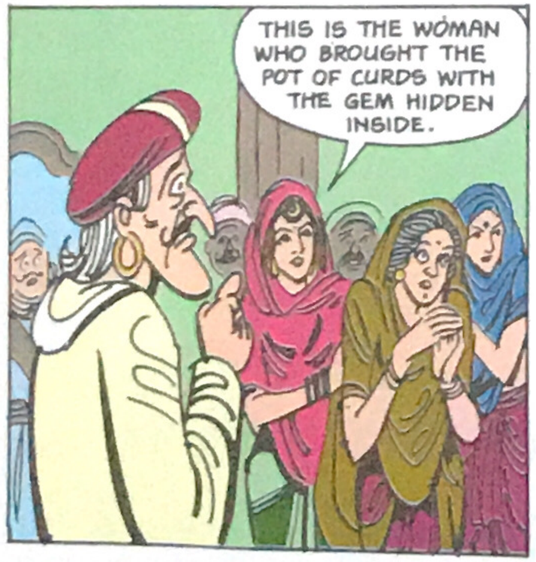

AFTER A FEW DAYS WHEN VAIDEHA HAD CALMED DOWN —
YOU DID NOT GIVE AUSHADHA A CHANCE TO EXPLAIN.
THE JEWEL WAS FOUND IN HIS HOUSE.

BUT THE ACCUSED MUST BE GIVEN A CHANCE TO DEFEND HIMSELF.
YOU ARE RIGHT. I SHALL DO THAT NOW.

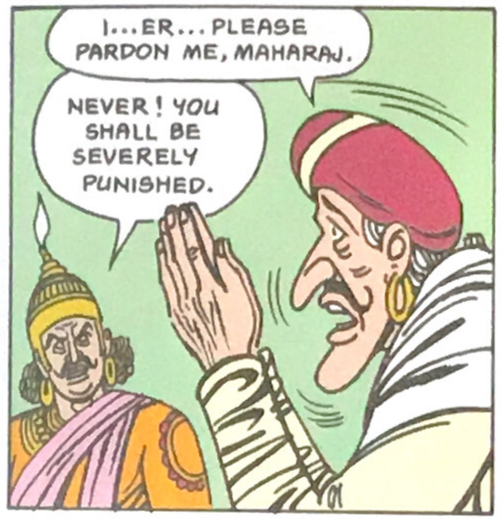
A SEARCH PARTY SENT BY THE KING BROUGHT AUSHADHA KUMAR BACK TO THE COURT.
HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THE RECOVERY OF THE CROWN JEWEL FROM YOUR HOME ?
MY WIFE COULD TELL YOU.

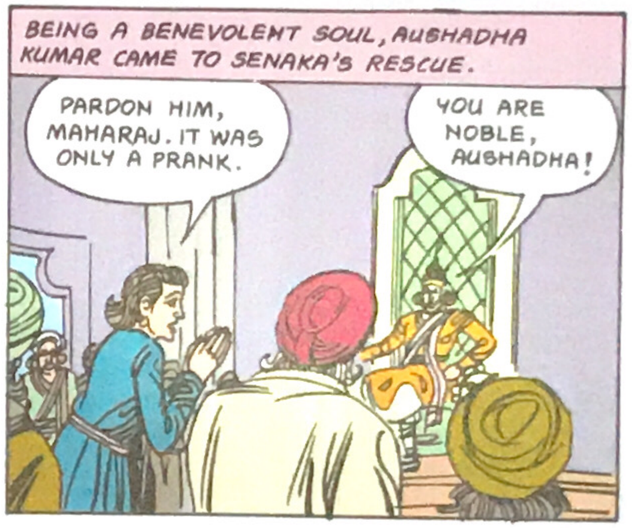

WHEN AMARA DEVI WAS SUMMONED TO THE COURT—
MAHARAJ, THE GEM CAME TO OUR HOUSE IN THIS POT.
AND WHO BROUGHT THE POT TO YOUR HOUSE?

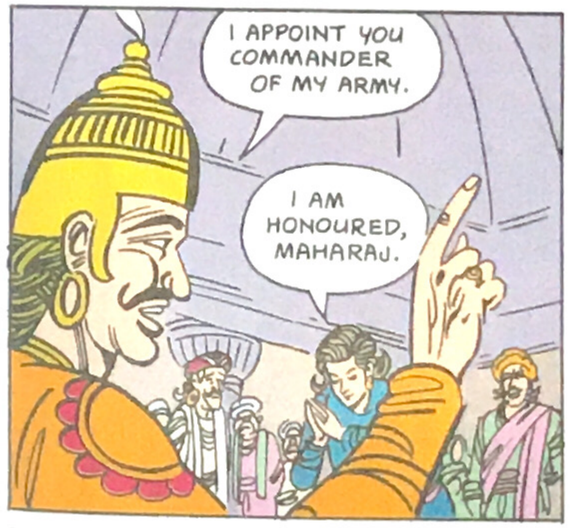

A VENDOR OF CURDS. I CAN HAVE HER BROUGHT HERE.
MAIDS! BRING HER IN.

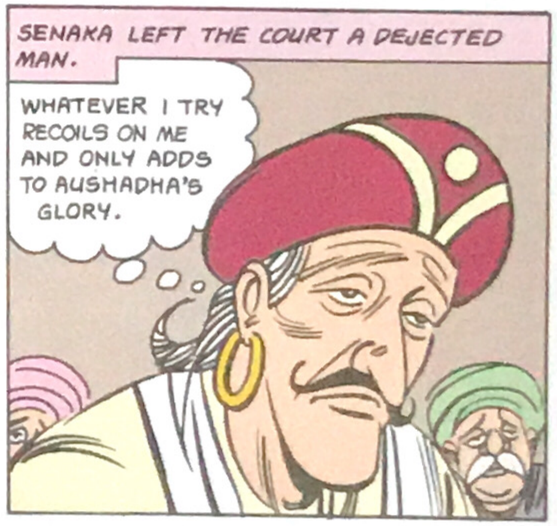

THIS IS THE WOMAN WHO BROUGHT THE POT OF CURDS WITH THE GEM HIDDEN INSIDE.

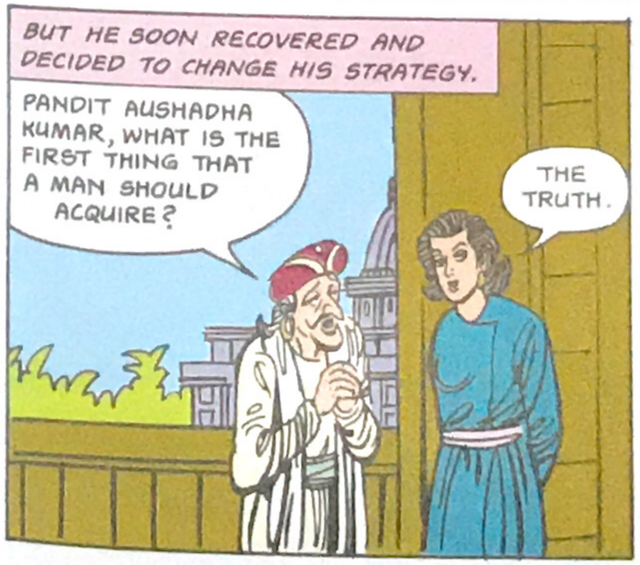
PARDON ME, MAHARAJ, SENAKA PANDIT GAVE ME THE POT.
YOU, SENAKA?


I...ER... PLEASE PARDON ME, MAHARAJ.
NEVER! YOU SHALL BE SEVERELY PUNISHED.

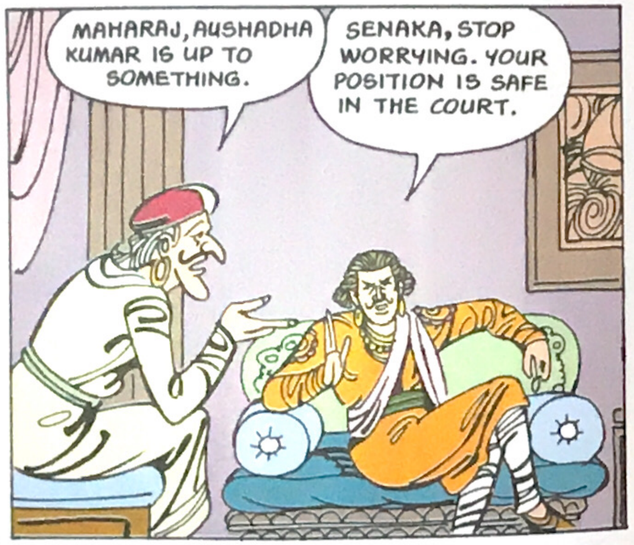

BEING A BENEVOLENT SOUL, AUSHADHA KUMAR CAME TO SENAKA'S RESCUE.
PARDON HIM, MAHARAJ. IT WAS ONLY A PRANK.
YOU ARE NOBLE, AUSHADHA!

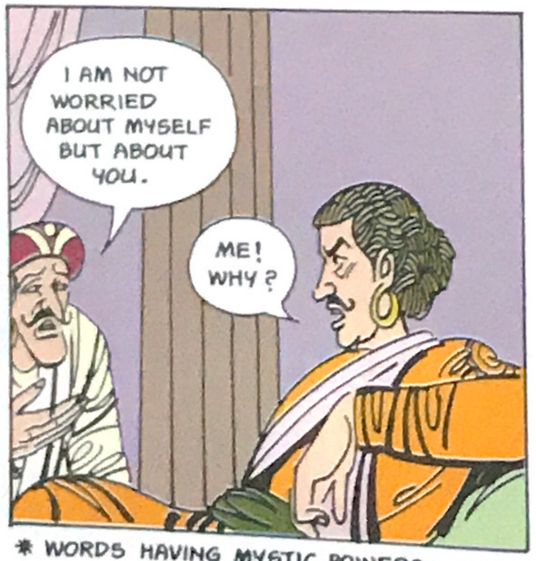

I APPOINT YOU COMMANDER OF MY ARMY.
I AM HONOURED, MAHARAJ.

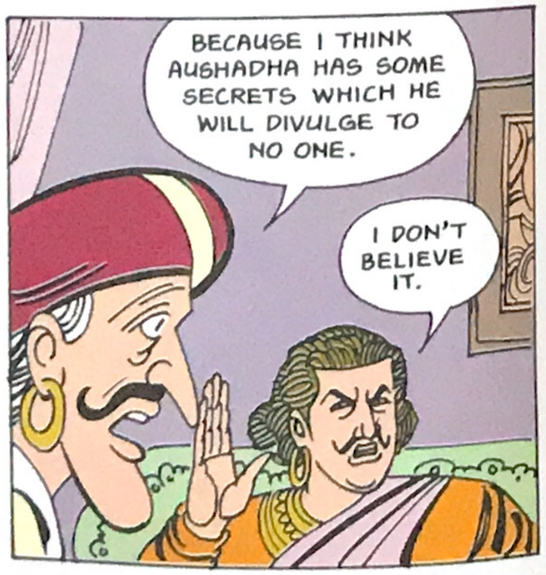

SENAKA LEFT THE COURT A DEJECTED MAN.
WHATEVER I TRY RECOILS ON ME AND ONLY ADDS TO AUSHADHA'S GLORY.


BUT HE SOON RECOVERED AND DECIDED TO CHANGE HIS STRATEGY.
PANDIT AUSHADHA KUMAR, WHAT IS THE FIRST THING THAT A MAN SHOULD ACQUIRE?
THE TRUTH.

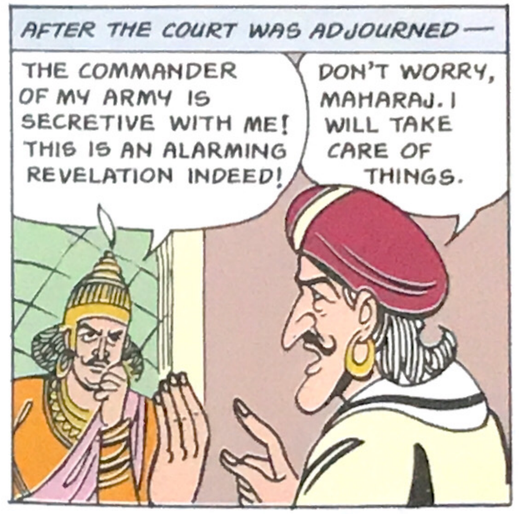
AND THEN?
WEALTH.

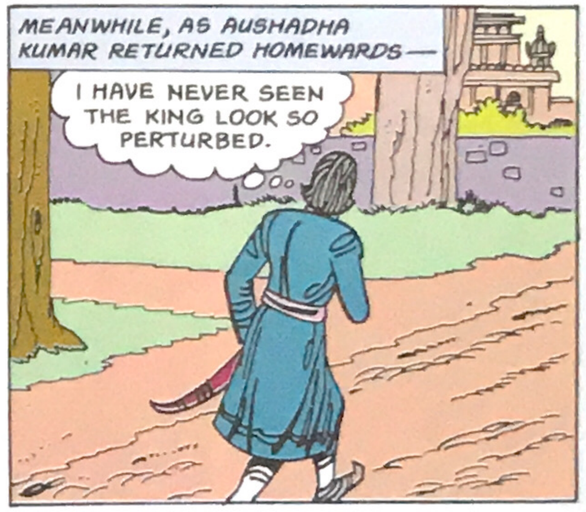


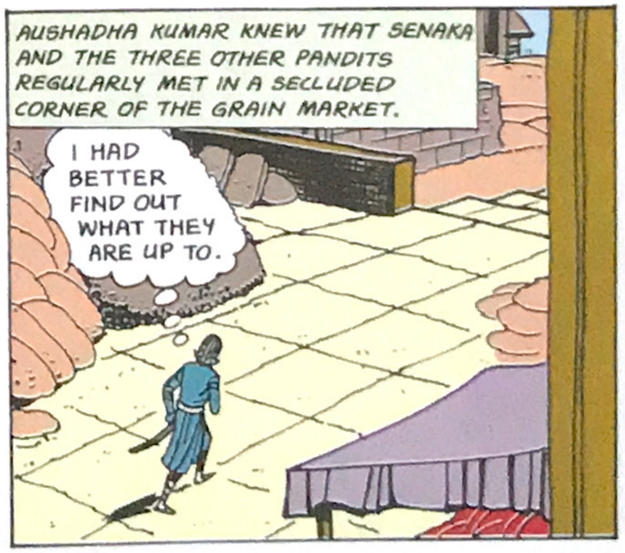




* WORDS HAVING MYSTIC POWERS

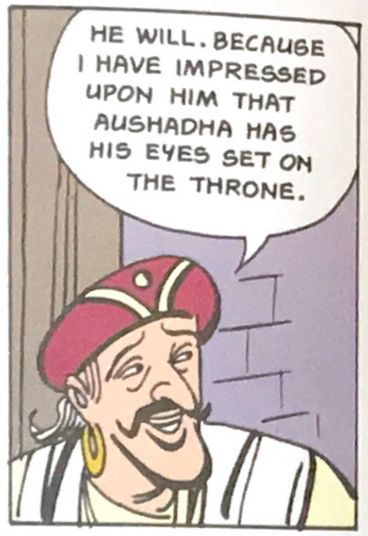






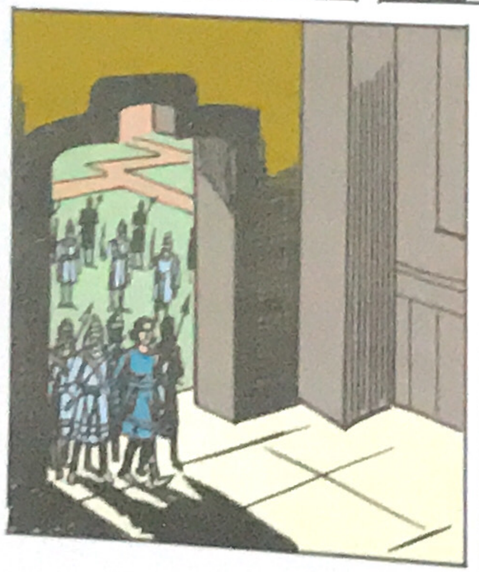
HE HID HIMSELF IN A HEAP OF GRAIN AND WAITED.

SOON THE FOUR PANDITS ARRIVED.
I HAVE HATCHED A SECRET PLAN. WE SHALL HAVE AUSHADHA MURDERED.
WILL THE KING APPROVE OF OUR ACT?

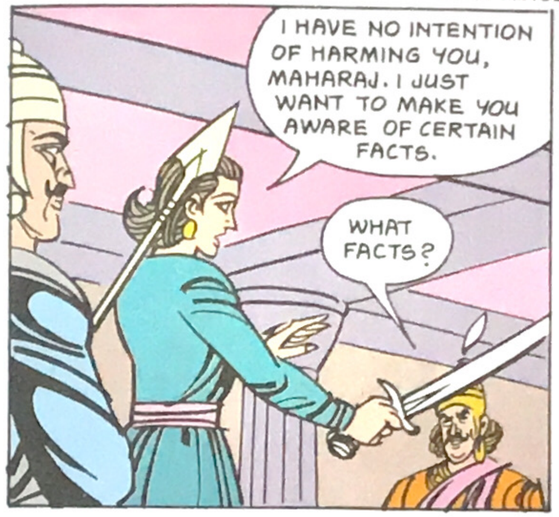

HE WILL. BECAUSE I HAVE IMPRESSED UPON HIM THAT AUSHADHA HAS HIS EYES SET ON THE THRONE.

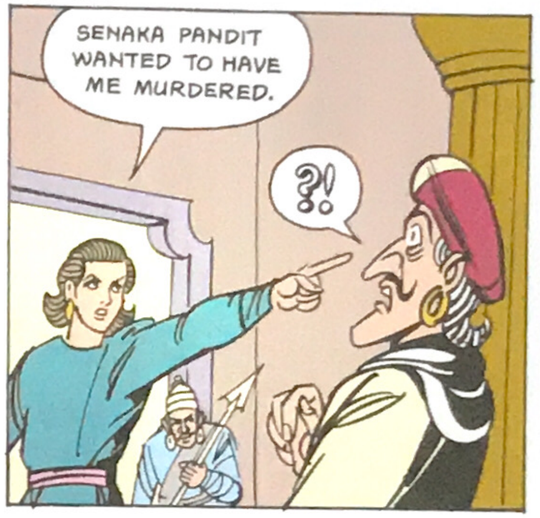
THIS SITUATION CALLS FOR DRASTIC ACTION.

AUSHADHA KUMAR GATHERED THE TROOPS AND SURROUNDED THE PALACE.
SEE THAT NO ONE ESCAPES.



AFTER ESTABLISHING HIS CONTROL OVER THE CITY, AUSHADHA KUMAR WENT TO MEET THE KING.
GLORY TO, KING VAIDEHA!
YOU HYPOCRITE! WHY DO YOU SHOUT MY PRAISES WHEN YOU ARE OUT TO DO ME HARM.

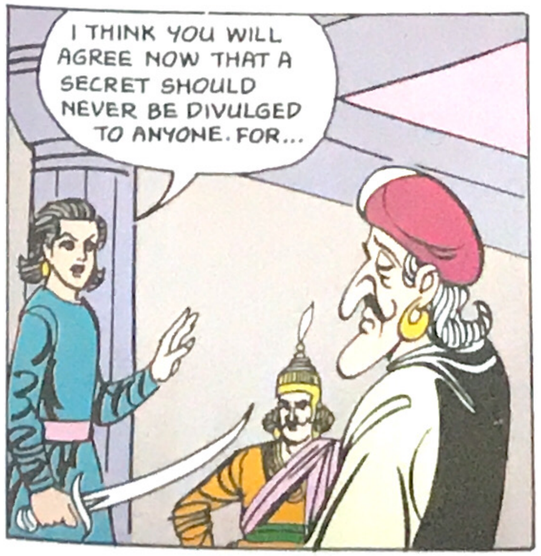

I HAVE NO INTENTION OF HARMING YOU, MAHARAJ. I JUST WANT TO MAKE YOU AWARE OF CERTAIN FACTS.
WHAT FACTS?


SENAKA PANDIT WANTED TO HAVE ME MURDERED.
?!

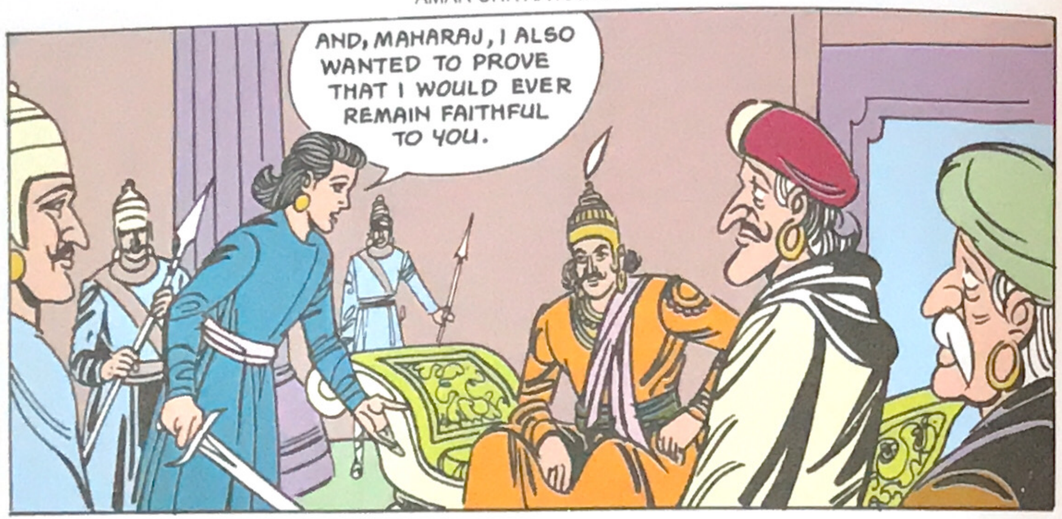
SO HE POISONED YOUR MIND TO GAIN YOUR SUPPORT.

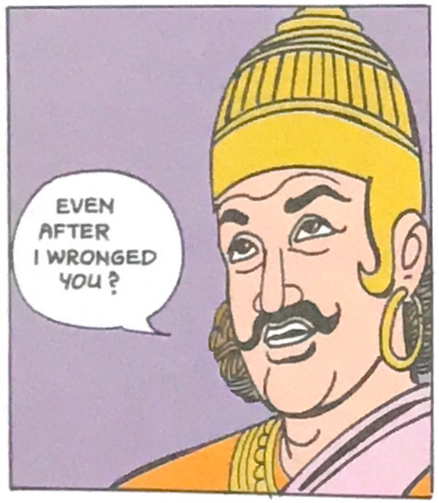
ARE YOU WONDERING HOW I LEARNT YOUR SECRET, SENAKA?

YOU REVEALED IT TO ME YOURSELF BY SPEAKING OF IT TO OTHERS.


I THINK YOU WILL AGREE NOW THAT A SECRET SHOULD NEVER BE DIVULGED TO ANYONE. FOR...

...THE MOMENT IT IS DIVULGED IT CEASES TO REMAIN A SECRET.


AND, MAHARAJ, I ALSO WANTED TO PROVE THAT I WOULD EVER REMAIN FAITHFUL TO YOU.

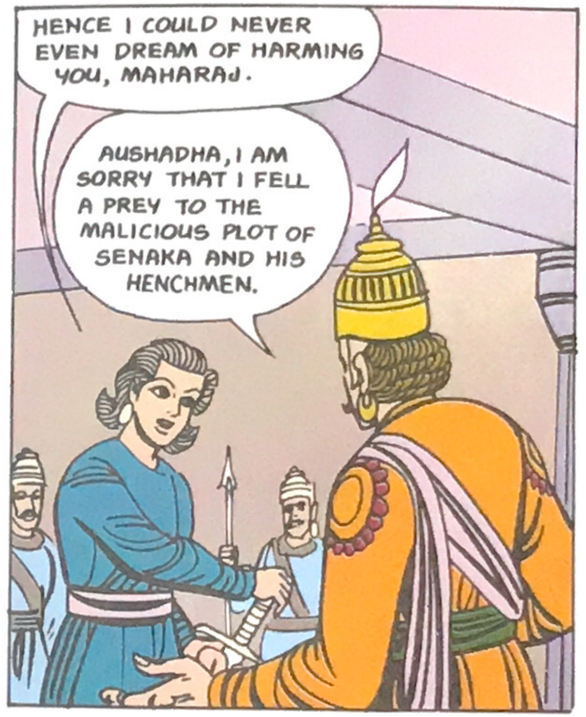

EVEN AFTER I WRONGED YOU?

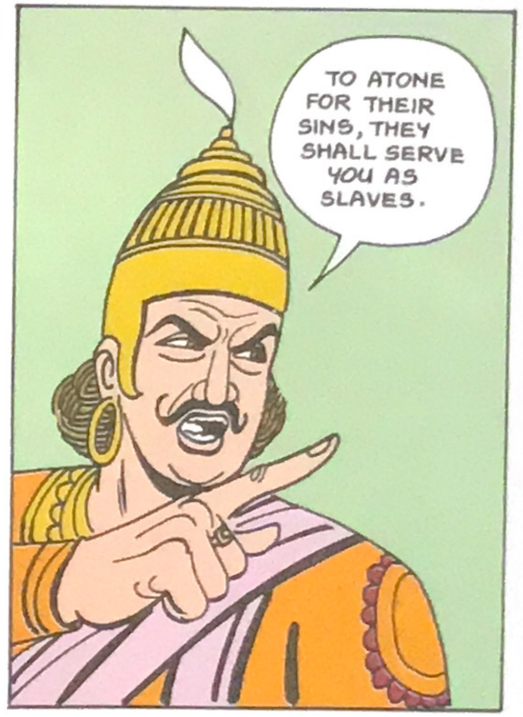
BUT YOU HAVE ALSO BEEN VERY KIND TO ME.

IT IS FORBIDDEN TO BREAK EVEN A BRANCH OF A TREE UNDER WHICH YOU HAVE TAKEN SHELTER...

...BECAUSE THEN IT HAS BECOME YOUR FRIEND. AND...

...IT IS A SIN TO WRONG A FRIEND.


HENCE I COULD NEVER EVEN DREAM OF HARMING YOU, MAHARAJ.
AUSHADHA, I AM SORRY THAT I FELL A PREY TO THE MALICIOUS PLOT OF SENAKA AND HIS HENCHMEN.


TO ATONE FOR THEIR SINS, THEY SHALL SERVE YOU AS SLAVES.

MAHARAJ, THEY WERE BLINDED BY THEIR SELFISHNESS. WITH YOUR PERMISSION, I WOULD FREE THEM FROM THE BONDS OF SLAVERY.
PARDON US, AUSHADHA PANDIT. YOU ARE TRULY WISE AND NOBLE.